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ABSTRACT

A study examined the sources of motivation of adults participating in the adult literacy program at the Bob Steele Reading Center (BSRC) in Hartford, Connecticut. The "life cycle" approach used to explore motivation throughout the stages of the literacy learning process included brief case studies focusing on the importance of socioemotional climate in making and sustaining a commitment to a literacy program and more extensive case studies examining the process of becoming literate over 1 year or a longer period. Quantitative data regarding the BSRC's instructional log, student writing, and student interviews were incorporated into the case studies along with analyses of the content of literacy instruction, outcomes, goals, and the implications of psychology in understanding adult literacy motivation. The data collected reinforced the principle advanced by advocates of competency-based and participatory learning that education needs to be purposeful. The BSRC's success in motivating students was concluded to stem largely from its integrated educational vision that links learners' needs, interests, and aspirations within the realm of the personal, practical, and sociocultural through autobiographic, collaborative, and local community contexts. (Contains 74 references. Appended is an interview with a BSRC student.) (MN)

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MOTIVATION AND THE ADULT NEW READER:
BECOMING LITERATE AT THE BOB STEELE READING CENTER

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Hartford, CT
Winter 1994

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MOTIVATION AND THE ADULT NEW READER:
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Preface

On October 9, 1989, the Bob Steele Reading Center moved into its new, permanent headquarters on Arbor Street in Hartford, Connecticut, located in an ethnically mixed west central portion of the city. In the life of this literacy program, such a move signified a momentus event. From the inception of the program in November 1986 until that time, the Reading Center was located in borrowed space at the Moylan Alternative High School. Initially set up as a neighborhood reading center, the program became a centralized tutoring site for volunteers and students within Literacy Volunteers of Greater Hartford (LVGH). During the late 1980s the program experienced considerable growth and more importantly, it had gained increased visibility within Literacy Volunteers of America-Connecticut (LVA-CT), and within LVGH. As a result, these two agencies began in 1988 to look for common space both for the Reading Center and the local affiliate which culminated in the move to Arbor Street.

At the time of the move, the Reading Center worked with about thirty students on a regular basis, predominantly in one-on-one tutoring. Within six months, student population doubled and several new instructional small groups began to form. Within a year, student population achieved fourfold growth and even more groups began to form. Much of this growth happened in a serendipitous manner through the dynamism inherent within the program's organizational and learning climate.

A sense of expectancy seemed pervasive among many students and tutors and the Center's atmosphere appeared replete with potentiality. A can do, flexible, experimental climate characterized the Center's operative mode between 1990-1992 which led to a range of viewpoints on the program's efficacy. I perceived the experimental climate as a major stimulus which provided the impetus not merely for further growth, but survival, itself since strong *institutional* support for the idiosyncratic nature of the program was lacking. Some tutors and students sensed a certain chaoticness in the small group tutoring program, which they believed, needed firmer structure. I did not disagree, except that I interpreted the experience *historically*. That is, within the life of this program, particularly at this start-up phase, a certain willingness to tolerate some ambiguity and tension seemed essential in order to make the transformative breakthroughs that could stabilize an extensive small group program.

It was during this creative phase that a comprehensive evaluation project would be needed, I thought, since so much of the motivational dynamic at work at the Center had limited institutional grounding. Given the "un-orthodoxy" of much of this growth, where for example, program development *preceded* formal training, strong institutional support *for the type of program that was emerging*, still seemed lacking from the broader organizational culture of LVGH. Agency leaders at this time were seeking a more "rational" approach to program development.

The only mechanism for evaluation available was LVA's standardized tests, which I considered woefully inadequate in even beginning to tell the story of what was happening at the Bob Steele Reading Center in the early 1990s. Yet, without a forum that substantially disclosed not only the external growth itself, but something of the intrinsic dynamism of the program, more "rational" forces that were linked in varying degrees to the operative assumptions of the functional literacy paradigm, might erode the distinctive character of the Center grounded in a more humanistic paradigm, propelled by a process-oriented philosophy. Such a framework is clarified throughout this study.

This study, therefore, is grounded in a certain dualism between what I describe as the functional literacy paradigm characteristic of the dominant social interpretation particularly among policy makers, government and top literacy and adult education agency heads, and a more humanistic orientation grounded in the pragmatic, progressive educational philosophy of John Dewey. This Deweyean view is a *res media* between functionalism and the countervailing "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" as expressed in the radical, oppositional thought of Paulo Freire. The emphasis on process, and a normative inclusiveness which is reformist rather than conservative or radical in any profoundly structural sense, is extremely difficult to construct as a program director. It is also not easy to articulate its theoretical underpinnings, particularly in a setting where simplicity is preferred over complexity in a broad social culture wherein the functional paradigm is viewed as normative.

However much ultimately, the Deweyan impulse is grounded in my own autobiographical dynamic, it seems to represent a pervasive force in the life of the Bob Steele Reading Center. In order to fully illuminate the working out of this philosophical framework, I needed some ways by which to evaluate the program congruent with a process orientation. Thus in 1990 I conceived of a comprehensive evaluation project consisting of a variety of qualitative dimensions, some of which are described throughout the study.

The project consisted initially of approximately forty short interviews of students and tutors that explored the content and mode of instruction, the climate of the Reading Center and the degree of support it provided. The material proved useful in flushing out some of the context of the instructional program and generally reinforced the notion that the Center provided a supportive environment for tutoring, noise level and space problems notwithstanding. In addition, I began to add a critical reflection on each piece.

I was faced with a dilemma. My objective in the interviews was to identify the learning climate and organizational culture of the Reading Center. The interviews provided helpful information, but required further contextualization for the full story I wanted to tell. Yet, the amount of work and paper already produced seemed extensive, particularly for a project whose merits seemed either dubious or incomprehensible for major agency stakeholders who looked for "harder," more visible measures of progress. For me, however, what was at stake was the way by which literacy would be defined and legitimized in the agency. I was convinced that there was something intrinsically invaluable in the interviews themselves; namely that a narrative rather than a statistical metaphor more authentically disclosed something of the story of becoming literate.

I decided, therefore, to *extend* the project by audio-taping and transcribing relatively lengthy interviews of group tutors. A volunteer ethnographer took the lead on this and worked with a group of students from the Hartford Graduate Center by interviewing approximately seven Reading Center small group tutors. The direction of the project, though, seemed even murkier. Since the entire program operated from a process mode, potentially there could be no end to the evaluation.

I put the project on hold for several months and ultimately re-defined it as *An Investigation Into Literacy*. The Investigation consists of the short and long interviews and additional transcribed interviews of tutors and project volunteers. We had now, approximately 500 pages of raw data and still had no clear sense of project closure. This study is a first attempt to make substantial sense out of those unwieldy sources and more fundamentally, of the Bob Steele Reading Center.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the students and tutors of the Bob Steele Reading Center from whom I have learned so much. This study after all, is but one effort to make visible some of the complexity and richness of the learning exchanges that occur routinely at the Center. I would also like to thank Angela Atwater, Laurie Tishler, Al Scopino, Andy Tyskiewicz and Marc Potish who have read and critically commented upon early drafts of this book. In addition, Angela imputed my work onto the computer and taught me how to make my own changes, most of them, that is. Much more importantly, without Angela, I never would have known about the Reading Center or LVA.

Sharon Smith, Sheila Lehman and Michael Lestz had little or nothing directly to do with this text, but their broader vision of what adult literacy could and should be has greatly informed my own practice and writing. Moreover, their research has profoundly influenced this study: Sheila, through her interviewing of group tutors; Sharon and Mike through their work in creating two books of oral history narratives, referred to in varying places throughout this study. Sharon also served as managing editor of *Welcome To Our World: A Book Of Writings By And For Students And Their Tutors* (1991), which I draw on extensively in this study.

My knowledge of adult literacy has also been informed and reinforced through Derrick Matthews' learning experiences as a student at the Bob Steele Reading Center over the past five years. Particularly striking is the potency of Derrick's intellectual drive and his commitment to ground knowledge experientially within the context of his life experiences. He is concerned, moreover, not merely with the articulation of autobiographical insight in "splendid isolation," but with community building at the Reading Center and throughout LVGH. In these and in many other ways, Derrick embodies the spirit of the Reading Center vision. For this reason, his learning history at the Bob Steele Reading Center is included in this text.

To my colleagues at LVGH, fellow staffers, Susan Roman, Steve Bender, Cheryl Johnson, Ethel Davis and Jack Bohuslaw, I owe a debt of gratitude for their support of the Reading Center and for their very pointed criticisms, at times, of my writing. They continually remind me that I need to write with specific audiences in mind. Sometimes, I listen. I am especially indebted to Doris Anne Hauptman, former Executive Director of LVGH, who along with Steve, I have shared so much history in the recent development of the Bob Steele Reading Center and the expansion of Literacy Volunteers of Greater Hartford. These have been exciting times.

I am especially indebted to my wife of over fifteen years, Sue. Without her support, this book would never have been written for the very simple reason that her encouragement made it possible for me to have taken the career leap that brought me to the Center. Sue has also lent important insight into my writing by challenging me toward greater clarity and simplicity. Although she is incredibly intelligent, she lets me know that there is much more to the human experience than the life of the mind. Sometimes, I listen.

Although perhaps a cliche by now, it remains true, nonetheless; this text, like so many others, is a product of many voices and many literacies.

To Evans Demetrion, 1957-1990
A great brother who is dearly missed

1953: I started to hate teachers. I was mentally and physically abused and lost all respect for them.

1990: I have grown to appreciate teachers. They've opened my eyes to a new and better world. Today I can start dreaming. I realize that I can find the paths to make my dreams come true. Now I can see the positive actions of hundreds of people from the American Literacy Volunteers whose devotion and patience has helped illiterate people like me. I know the effort my tutor puts in for me is time consuming. Also the gifts of friendship holds a special place in my heart. I feel like I've been blind up till now. I would like to personally acknowledge Pat as a special person and excellent teacher. Without him there would be no need for this letter because I could not write or read it. He also helps me help friends to learn to read and write. I believe that all good deeds are rewarded. I also know that Pat will be rewarded someday for the good deeds he's done for me.

Patrick Lizotte, student at the Bob Steele Reading Center.

I see that even for myself, reading and writing, that's all I wanted, but come to find out, it was more than that I wanted because it opened up a lot of doors. When you keep on feeding the brain with new ideas, knowledge about reading and writing and other learning skills, other doors are opened up.

Derrick Matthews, student at the Bob Steele Reading Center.

If anything it's brightened up my life knowing that I come off better than I was. I learned more than I knowed when I first started coming. So it has inspired me. I felt down when I first started coming. So it has inspired me. I felt down when I first started coming, but now I don't. I feel good about it, about myself, since I'm doing it. And now 'specially since I know I can read much better than I could, and write better than I could. I couldn't even think about writing a letter then; couldn't do that. So I just say it's been a big improvement; my head's coming up.

A former student at the Bob Steele Reading Center

We always live at the time we live and not at some other time, and only by extracting at each present time the full meaning of each present experience are we prepared for doing the same thing in the future. This is the only preparation which in the long run amounts to anything.

John Dewey, American philosopher.

(I)

Introduction

Theoretical Underpinnings

This study seeks to identify sources of motivation in adult literacy learning through an extensive case-study analysis of the program the author directs: the Bob Steele Reading Center in Hartford, Connecticut. The program is a centralized, staff supervised site within Literacy Volunteers of Greater Hartford (LVGH). It was founded in 1986 as a pilot project in contrast to the prevailing Literacy Volunteer of America (LVA) model where an individual student and tutor "match" meet in isolation from the community of learners and program staff often in such public places as the local library, community centers or churches. The Center works with about 100 students on a regular basis in English as a Second Language (ESL) and Basic Literacy (BL) through individual matches and small group tutoring. In its seven year history, the Center has undertaken work in student writing (Smith, 1991), oral history narration (Smith, Ball, Demetrion and Michelson,1993; Lestz, Demetrion and Smith, 1994), portfolio development (Taylor, 1992; Constantine, 1991), an experiential counseling and referral service through a college internship (Arrojo, 1993), and an on-going, qualitative research project. This study represents a piece of that latter project and focuses on the students in the Basic Literacy program.

Work on adult literacy motivation is scant. Allen Quiqley stresses the negative issue of "resistance" (1990), while Linda Ziegahn studies the motivation of adult new readers who do not participate in regular literacy programs (1992). Although she does not discuss motivation directly, Susan L. Lytle identifies beliefs as "the core or critical dimension in (the)...movement toward enhanced literacy," which may even serve as "a primary source or anchor for other dimensions of growth" (1991, 121). Hanna Fingeret and Paul Jurmo link motivation to the establishment of a participatory pedagogical framework (1990), while whole language advocates like Frank Smith stress the importance of "meaning-making" in becoming literate (1979, 1988). Advocates of radical, critical literacy, meanwhile, link the motivation to read the word with the ability to transform the world (Freire, 1970, 1985).

In a study that is less theoretically grounded than those above, Beder and Valentine (1990) tackle the issue of motivation directly through a "62 item scale to measure motivations...based on in-depth interviews of (12) learners" (78) in Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs throughout Iowa. Through complex factor analysis:

> Ten dimensions of motivation were identified:
>
> (a) self-improvement, (b) family responsibilities, (c) diversion, (d) literacy development, (e) community/church involvement, (f) job advancement, (g) launching, (h) economic need, (i) educational advancement and (j) urging of others (78).

These "factors" were based on surveys of 3090 ABE learners in 255 classes throughout the state (82).

Beder and Valentine's impressive survey makes a significant contribution in identifying sources of motivation among those who participate in "mainstream" ABE programs. They conclude that "motivation is multidimensional and goes well beyond the desire to improve basic skills" (93). My study concurs with this observation and with much of their general findings.

Beder and Valentine's methodology which is meant to examine motivation *extensively*, does not, however, provide much insight on the *experience* of motivation. This study, which is grounded in a phenomenological methodology of extensive case-study description and analysis, attempts to accomplish that. Through a collage effect, it orders expressed and observed learner experience and other relevant data in particular ways which, while invariably reflecting something of the world view of the writer, depicts certain, often hard-to-identify aspects of adult literacy learner motivation in one particular program.

In this respect, the study shares important similarities with the research of Fingeret and Danin (1991) that focuses predominantly on literacy learners from Literacy Volunteers of New York City (LVNYC). That study provides a comprehensive overview on the impact of literacy instruction on the lives of its students, and their conclusions in important respects are similar to mine. Like this study, they point to both "changes and limits to change," and the ineradicably situational or what I refer to as the idiosyncratic dimensions of adult literacy learning (1991, ii). Like this study and others cited, Fingeret and Danin identify the overwhelming desire among learners to embrace "mainstream" social and cultural values. Within such an orienting framework, they demonstrate the many complex and nuanced ways wherein enhanced literacy enriches both the personal and communal lives of new readers at work, home, the neighborhood, within the literacy program and within the interiorized sphere of the self.

This study concurs and seeks space largely within the given political culture for an evolutionary project of growth through education. In key respects, it is grounded in the hermeneutics of the American pragmatic and neo-pragmatic intellectual tradition, drawing extensively on John Dewey's theory of education which is only explicitly *articulated* in the study's conclusion. The emphasis on growth and the *enhancement* of experience through education, however, key Deweyan themes, are pervasive throughout the study.

My embracing of pragmatism sometimes seems an illusion, although more fundamentally, it serves as a grounding article of faith that this tradition speaks most compellingly, however faintly at times, to both the opportunities and constraints inherent within the political culture of the United States. In this respect, it takes issue with the radical, emancipatory camp (Freire, 1970; 1985) which might interpret the role of literacy among learners identified by Fingeret and Danin (1991) and myself as a form of "co-optation," or "false consciousness," where through education, marginalized populations internalize dominant social values that often act against their "authentic" needs and interests. It also takes issue with what I refer to in the study as the functional paradigm (Chisman, 1989; 1990), grounded in a technocratic persuasion that links purposeful literacy development with certain "needs" for citizens and employees to "function proficiently in society."

Instead, as I argue elsewhere, "much space remains (open) for a middle ground between a reification of the status quo through functional literacy and the utopian illusion of the 'pedagogy of the oppressed'" (1993, 30-31). That space is the American reform tradition. As new left scholars have pointed out so well, historically, evolutionary gradualism has thus far failed in coming even close to realizing its inclusive, egalitarian vision; its movement to what Dewey refers to as "the Great Community." This critique of the mainstream is vital to the political culture of the nation and as *theory* is compelling in many respects.

Yet, it too, is a historically failed tradition on having any profound impact on society, notwithstanding its energies in informing such movements as feminism, Afrocentricism and engendering a greater respect for pluralism and equality in the public square (Diggins, 1992). Any "emancipatory" ideology that has had sustained impact on the American political culture, however, has been forced to come to terms with the reform tradition and has exercised little choice but to compromise its radical edges in order to enjoy social influence. The issue for the nation is the extent to which such "compromises" can lead to enhanced existence for as many people as possible. At stake is the extent to which thoughtful people can work within the system, both within the "mainstream" and around its edges for meaningful reform even while exercising a critical edge or whether the only meaningful response is, at least for literacy, what Giroux refers to as "A Pedagogy for the Opposition" (1983).

This study does not provide an answer to this problem for it is enmeshed within the struggle for meaning and direction in search of a viable pedagogy for our times. Nonetheless, it perceives within the American pragmatic tradition some potentiality that resonates more compellingly than either structural-functionalism or various strands of radical opposition, with both the constraints and opportunities inherent within the political culture of the United States at the end of the twentieth century. The pragmatic project could fail. Many would argue that it probably will. This remains, however, an open issue that can only be worked out historically. Perhaps that is why at this time it requires at least as much of a hearing as the various European ideologies that have had such a profound impact on the intellectual and social history of the United States in this century. This study is one attempt to bring the pragmatic heritage to bear on adult literacy education through an extensive exploration of one local program.

Overview

This study takes a "life-cycle" perspective in exploring motivation throughout the "stages" of the literacy learning process at the Bob Steele Reading Center. Through brief case studies, it first focuses on entry points by examining the importance of socio-emotional climate in the making and sustaining of commitment to the program. While the general point that a supportive climate facilitates commitment may appear self-evident, it underscores the importance of relationship building as a bedrock that stabilizes and sustains commitment. It also points out the limitations of the Reading Center program as a centralized site to meet the needs of certain students who, in some cases, might be better served in neighborhood centers which

LVGH has begun to address through the pioneering work of Outreach Manager Steve Bender.

The study then examines the process of becoming literate through four extensive case-studies that explore literacy development historically over a one or more year period. This section confirms the importance of socio-emotional support but looks more closely at the different ways people have learned and the diverse issues learners are working through in the process of becoming literate. Through these case-studies, I examine the relationship between whole language approaches to reading and basic skill development. I also look at the unique situation of each learner and the centrality of idiosyncracity to the learning process, consequently, the subjective nature of self-defined success and goal identification. Such factors make problematical the relevance of standardized assessment "instruments" in evaluating individual growth and program effectiveness. The case-studies also provide insight on the Bob Steele Reading Center as a literacy learning environment.

In order to evaluate literacy across the learning cycle, I draw on a wide range of qualitative data from the Reading Center's data bank. These include an instructional log, student writing and student interviews. Each type of evidence discloses different dimensions of motivation. The log provides an assessment on the breadth of topics students worked on. The student writing provides more of a qualitative description on the value of particular content areas, although much of the evidence drawn from this source remains impressionistic, requiring "thick" interpretation. The interviews provide insight on the ways students make connections between different types of literacy and often, provide direct evidence on the relationship between motivation and content for particular students. Cumulatively, the evidence provides a comprehensive profile on both the breadth and depth of the content of literacy instruction that has engaged students at the Bob Steele Reading Center over a three year period.

In the typology of my "stage development" thesis, content serves as an intermediate link between process and goals. Such divisions are necessarily artificial, as process, content, outcomes, and goals are complexly intertwined in unique ways for particular learners. While it is difficult to directly assess the importance of content, it provides clues about motivation that are often inferential, but nonetheless expand our understanding of this topic even while leaving many questions unanswered.

Moving "forward" through the stages of motivation, I then explore student outcomes by identifying some of the visible benefits of adult literacy education. The evidence is drawn from several sources of standardized and narrative documentation, namely test scores, "life-skill" achievement lists, interviews and oral history narratives. I define outcomes as specific accomplishments that in some way can be linked to increased literacy and distinguish them from goals which are more global and sometimes diffuse. The inclusion of test scores may be viewed as nebulous, in part, for what they actually disclose: an abstract sense of quantitative growth, unrelated to the concrete ways literacy is actually utilized in specific situations (Tierney, Carter and Desai, 1991, 21-34). Still, they are included here as one source of evidence not so much for what they signify for particular students, but what they indicate more aggregately about the program.

Life-skill achievements provide more information on outcomes attained by specific students. Recently, the achievement list has been increased to reflect more of the aspects of the process of becoming literate, underscoring the thesis that literacy is a complex socio-linguistic phenomena, whereby social and emotional experiences of learners become intimately linked with literacy learning. In recent times, LVA has fully embraced this view, expressed in its training manuals, *Small Group Tutoring: A Collaborative Approach for Literacy Instruction* (Cheatham and

Lawson, 1990) and *Tutor: A Collaborative Approach to Literacy Instruction* (Cheatham, Colvin and Laminack, 1993).

Thus, participating in more than one group is viewed as an important precondition, for example, in obtaining a driver's license and both are codified on the achievement list as outcomes, reflecting the influence of socialization as well as "pure" instruction on the grounds that effective literacy development requires a connection between them. Yet, a codified list, even one that makes room for process, identifies what is significant from the perspective of the program managers. However much they resonate with the motivational drives of the learners as well, they provide no direct evidence on their significance for particular students. Much more than test score "instruments," however, they point toward concrete outcomes, which combined with other evidence, can provide a useful angle in better understanding the sources of motivation among the Basic Literacy Learners at the Bob Steele Reading Center.

The ethnographic documentation taken from the student interviews and oral history narratives illuminate the relationship between outcomes and motivation from the perspectives of the students. The short interviews point to specific outcomes, but provide little scope for students to elaborate on their significance. The oral history narratives illuminate those in more vivid ways.

Goal identification represents the most elusive "stage" in the development of motivation among the learners at the Bob Steele Reading Center. I make a distinction between explicit goals which differ from outcomes primarily in degree, and implicit goals or aspirations, which at their more profound spectrum, link literacy development with core life values of being and becoming that call people further into life through the on-going construction of their personal and social identities. Students have attained certain explicit goals through their literacy development at the Reading Center. These more implicit aspirations represent perpetual drives that continuously prod learners on. The satisfaction is not only in their attainment but also in their role as a stimulus in the continuous calling forth of enhanced being. It is the energy released in the process which often serves as a powerful source of motivation. It is the most elusive aspect of the adult literacy experience to describe which may be nurtured or negated by particular programs. Such released energy perhaps represents one of the most fundamental sources of adult literacy motivation.

Teacher Research: An Insider's View

This study is an exercise in what Cochran-Smith and Lytle refer to as "teacher research" (1993). It reflects an insider's perspective that is not easily accessible to the "outside observer, even if that observer assumes an ethnographic stance and spends considerable time in the classroom" (Cochnran-Smith and Lytle, 1993, 18). In viewing the complexity of adult literacy development from my own perspective, there is some apprehension that the effort may be overly biased. That the study only discloses certain aspects of the learning experience at the Bob Steele Reading Center is readily admitted as is the recognition that other observers, detached or participatory, might offer a quite different take on the Center's learning climate. On the other hand, as a reflection on a program in which I have been so personally invested, this study moves in specific directions that the interested outsider, however well informed, might not even consider. If the gap between practice and research is ever to be mitigated, it is essential that practitioners engage in serious research on their practice. In more recent times, the participatory-observer paradigm has often placed university based scholars in local settings to work collaboratively with practitioners (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1993, 5-7).

Yet, as Cochran-Smith and Lytle point out, projects are usually initiated at the universities, read by scholars and raise issues primarily of interest to the academy. In teacher research by contrast, issues generally emerge out of practice, often in the desire to comprehend or resolve some perplexity inherent within practice (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1993, 12). Teacher researchers sometimes draw on a wide range of scholarship, but integrate it eclectically, seeking first to comprehend experience. This study, for example, is grounded in a felt anxiety that humanistic approaches to adult literacy are endangered in programs and agencies whose social and cultural milieus are shaped so extensively by a "post-industrial" ethos which links literacy development primarily with economic revitalization and the deployment of coping strategies among those who will serve at the lower rungs of its social and economic ladder (Chisman, 1989, 1990). The point of this study is not to deny the importance of economic revitalization as one component in an adult literacy curriculum, but particularly for programs grounded in a self-directed ethos, to make a vigorous case that adult literacy learners have the capacity and desire to undertake comprehensive approaches to learning in practical, personal, and socio-cultural realms that resonate with a wide diversity of needs, interests, and aspirations in a multiplicity of contexts.

Notwithstanding my inevitable biases, this essay is far from "merely" a subjective foray of my own experiences and observations. Rather, it represents a "systematic and intentional inquiry" that Cochran-Smith and Lytle view as critical for the emerging field of teacher research (1993, 18). This is accomplished not only through the "multiple data sources" (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1993, 18) the study employs, but in the structured approach to motivation through the various "stages" of becoming literate. If there is something finally elusive about the study, I would maintain that such a quality has been inherent in the experience of adult literacy education, at least at the Bob Steele Reading Center. This study seeks to disclose something of that elusiveness, along with articulating many of the concrete and complex dimensions of adult literacy learning, sifted through the lenses of one reflective practitioner (Schon, 1983).

(2)

Socio-Emotional Influences

Adult literacy learning is an integrated phenomenon whereby mind and emotion come together, mediated by social support networks and collaborative learning environments. It is not merely cognitive development as an isolated skill, but the need for enhanced self-esteem which provides the ground for an expanding self-perception that enables literacy learning to take place (Matthews, 1993). According to a noted social psychologist, "efficacy" is at the root of motivation (Bandura, 1977). However imperfectly, The Bob Steele Reading Center has provided such support for many students even while it has failed with others. The following case studies illuminate the importance of socio-emotional support for literacy development and the desirability of a learning environment which encourages such efforts.

Willie

Consider Willie, a sixty year old for lift driver, born and raised in Georgia. Early in 1990, his wife brought him to the Center for intake. Initially Willie was reluctant to participate in the program. It seemed evident to me that one of his basic concerns was whether his personality would be enhanced or diminished in attempting to undertake the intrepid journey toward literacy. The emotional climate which he perceived at the Center, therefore, would determine his participation. During the intake, I had a relaxed, informal conversation with him. I also enlisted the aid of one of our experienced students to let Willie know about the program. (Sometime later, Willie played a similar role in initiating another nervous student, (Smith et. al., 150). That increased his confidence.

It quickly became evident that Willie could read next to nothing, so I shortened the standardized testing procedure in order to forestall any sense of failure. Instead, I took an oral history narration from the New Reader's Press collection called *Remembering* (1990). The story we chose told of an old Italian grandmother who had nine children and worked very hard. It was a paragraph in length and I took an assisted reading approach. Initially, I read the story, pointing to the words as Willie watched. On successive readings, Willie increasingly read more of the text, so that by the end of the evening, he read the entire passage independently. That led to a felt sense of success. The passage provoked a conversation about Willie's childhood enabling him to consider the text empathetically in light of his own experience, so reading for meaning was also established that evening. Willie became convinced that the program was appropriate for him and decided to join what Frank Smith refers to as the "literacy club" (1988).

Pat

Pat, a French Canadian from New Brunswick, illiterate both in French and English was a forty-three year old construction worker who also nervously came to the Center with his wife. He had an unsatisfactory elementary schooling experience in Canada which contributed to the diminishment of his self-concept. As Pat put it:

> I got to third grade and asked my teacher to help me learn my syllables and she told me I should have learned them in the 1st grade. She never showed me. Because I was poor, I was put aside in school. The only thing I learned in school was how to fight and defend myself from the principal's straps and rulers (Smith, 1991 154).

Like Willie, Pat did not want to be pushed, but wanted to find his own way into literacy in a manner that authenticated his sense of self.

Initially, I worked with Pat since no tutor was immediately available. I used an assisted reading approach and identified particular words that persistently stumped him, emphasizing either a phonetic or sight word memorization approach depending on what best facilitated Pat's learning process in a given instructional situation. We also talked a lot and had fun. I have come across the term "warm fuzzies" often used in a derogatory way to describe the LVA tutoring experience, particularly when "hard" data about observable and "measurable" results have been difficult to ascertain. While at times such "hand-holding" may prove excessive, the underlying need is the centrality of relationship building for effective adult literacy learning. The student-tutor relationship is expressed in a variety of ways, but for the vast majority of students and for many tutors, an emotional bond represents the bedrock for stabilizing the match to enable learning to take place.

This has been clearly evident with Pat. I obtained a tutor for him, but their personalities clashed and Pat stopped coming. In this particular case, the tutor was nervous and overly serious. There was little personal interaction, and the tutor attempted to keep Pat to the tutor's agenda. As far as Pat was concerned, this resembled his childhood schooling experience where he perpetually failed and was punished. Pat began to lose confidence in his learning aptitude. In an interview, Pat commented on the centrality of support in the tutoring relationship as follows: "Even if we have a bad session", it is important that the tutor give encouragement. Encouragement "is number one." This is "so we don't feel like we're nothing."

I called Pat and encouraged him to return to the program by agreeing to serve as his tutor until an *appropriate* person could be found. Several months later we found that tutor whose combination of personality and aptitude made this an ideal match. The success of this match had less to do with the experience of Pat's recently college graduated tutor, Patrick Ladd, than his basic openness to relationship building and the learning process. On occasion, the new tutor fumbled in his attempt to figure out an effective instructional program, but for his student, it did not really matter because the bedrock of trust and commitment became firmly established through their relationship.

Pat has now been in the program for over two years. He has increased his reading level in terms of objective scoring and is using his reading skills in many practical ways. His self-confidence has soared. He has achieved psychological distance from a negative childhood experience, where he often thought of himself as "nobody," and now reflects critically and with sensitivity on his past (Smith et. al., 1993, 142-151). He has completed an oral history at the Reading Center and is extremely proud of that. He wants to tell his story and has spoken at fund raising functions and tutor training workshops even though he is not naturally a public speaker.

Pat also accomplished something else extremely noteworthy. He has a friend, a non-reader, who did not want to come to the Center. So, Pat used what he had learned in his own tutoring sessions and began to tutor his friend on his own. I am unsure how technically proficient were those tutoring sessions, but at the least Pat established the emotional connection which enabled his friend to begin the courageous trek toward literacy. His friend came to the Center and had made some progress, although he has since left.

In a two year period, Pat has shown modest gains on standardized test scores. His interview and oral history provide some information on the value of such learning in practical applications and in the building of his self-concept. What is of importance also, is the cultural and social milieu that gives shape to the learning environment: the role of The Bob Steele Reading Center in providing emotional support which in turn, enabled Pat to transfer such encouragement to his friend. Much more is involved than giving "warm fuzzies." Rather, it is the centrality of personhood and the inviolability of relationship building which serve as among the most compelling of cornerstones in facilitating long term adult literacy development.

Learning to read in adulthood requires emotional and social support. Trust and friendship, endangered values in our mass, "post-industrial" society are central to the process of learning how to read. The Bob Steele Reading Center has fostered a supportive socio-emotional climate which has enabled learners like Pat and Willie to take on the courageous journey toward literacy. Yet, as the following case demonstrates, the Center's environment has not been as conducive to the needs of all potential literacy learners.

Sandra

Once Willie and Pat began their work at the Center in earnest, their motivational drives were firmly set. The same can not be said for Sandra, whose efforts have been more tenuous, over a several year on-off again process. Whereas Willie and Pat, one African-American, the other Caucasian, have enjoyed middle class social status while employed in blue-collar work, Martha has been a life-long resident of the inner-city, who lives in one of Hartford's south end housing projects and is on welfare.

Initially, Sandra joined the Center at its Moylan School location in 1988. She was pregnant at the time and had to walk over a mile to attend the evening program. Attendance was sporadic and her tutor decided that the match should be terminated. I agreed as well since we could not resolve the transportation problem. Martha returned to our program in 1990 and had made arrangements for her new tutor to pick her up at home. On several occasions Sandra was not home at the pre-arranged time which infuriated the young white suburban tutor who had no particular affinity for the environment of the housing project. The tutor terminated the match, and we had no immediate way of providing Sandra with other support.

Several months later, Sandra called the office, desiring to re-enter the program. We had limited options. I had no resources to resolve her transportation problem however "legitimate" they may have been and was sensitive that our program was perhaps victimizing her, where a life-time of social conditioning and poverty have played such an impact in shaping her self-identity. I explained to Sandra, therefore, that we could only offer her tutoring at the Center, and she would have to make arrangements for her own transportation through the city bus system. I was able to provide her with an individual tutor and space in our small group tutoring program, which she initially attended. I also encouraged her to take more responsibility for her learning and in exchange, the program would support her efforts. I did not lecture Sandra. Rather, I engaged her in a realistic conversation about both the strengths and limitations of our program and the importance of self-ownership in the adult literacy learning process.

The relationship between Bill, a retiree who has worked with many students throughout the city at different sites, and Sandra had been respectful, although clearly "on-task." Bill was very much the "teacher" while Sandra played the role of the "student." This proved reasonably effective because it provided what each wanted and expected; essentially, a reconstruction of a traditional model of education on more personalized terms. Such a framework contained significant drawbacks, particularly in fostering any sense of participatory literacy education, but it enabled the tutoring to proceed. Although far from ideal, both she and Bill sensed that progress had been achieved, however limited. Sandra had also internalized a sense of obligation to Bill, however at times, misguided that had been. One time the match almost ended because Sandra was unable to carry out a homework assignment. She stopped attending because, as she put it, she did not want to face Bill "empty-handed." I discussed the situation with Bill and he agreed to continue.

Sandra entered the program as a complete non-reader and after a year's work with Bill had achieved only minimal progress which both viewed, nonetheless, as significant. Whether or not Sandra will ever attain enough reading fluency to achieve her career dream of moving off welfare toward achieving an entry level office position remains to be seen. She has a long way to go and many roadblocks to overcome. At the least, she has attained some reading proficiency and has the capacity to learn more. At the end of her year of study, she began to assume greater self-responsibility, applied reading at least minimally in daily life situations, and laid the groundwork in her own experience to support her children with their schooling. Mover, like Pat, she has also brought a friend to the Center and had therefore helped to extend the learning network to others.

According to Brian Street, what makes literacy salient is not its "autonomous" quality (1984), but the contexts in which the entire literacy process interfaces with the "lived experience" of the learner within a range of often intersecting personal and social forces. From this point of view there had been an impact: enhanced self-esteem, increased social responsibility, parenting socialization enhancement, and a collaborative relationship with her peers which may have helped to diminish the incredible alienation and isolation that Sandra seemed to have experienced. As with all of us, Sandra's story is not complete. What she can not accomplish now may or may not be accessible to her later. At the least, a cornerstone had been lain which had salience for her, that may become increasingly important to her in the future.

Willie, Pat and Sandra illustrate the complex ways that social and emotional factors influence the adult literacy learning process. Their stories provide glances into the many ways that literacy development can be enhanced or derailed. They allude as well to the elusive quality of success that can only be grasped in highly personal terms. The stories also draw attention to some of the variety of ways by which literacy becomes embedded into the consciousness and social experience of beginning readers. More is involved than simply enhanced reading ability, but how engaging the literacy process in its social, emotional and cognitive dimensions influences the life history of learners in a variety of tangible and intangible ways. This study is not equipped to grapple with such complex issues in a definitive manner, but it does provide many glimpses into the psychic and social phenomena of the adult literacy experience which play such a crucial role in defining the meanings of literacy.

(3)

The Process of Becoming Literate: Case-Studies

The previous section broadly examined some of the complex and highly idiosyncratic ways in which social and emotional factors influence adult literacy learning. This section will continue to draw out those connections, but will more closely focus on the "stages" of increasing literacy mastery as they have unfolded within particular lives. The following case studies provide rich insight on the progression of literacy development for four students who have learned in fundamentally different ways. While this section can not lay claim to comprehensiveness, it brings to the fore critical aspects in the *process* of becoming literate: the centrality of life experience, the quest for integrative learning, the variability of pace and the diverse relationship between basic skill development and reading for meaning and purpose.

Orlando

Orlando, Puerto Rican born and in his late twenties, was married and had an eight year old son when he entered the Reading Center program. When he moved to the mainland as a boy, he attended bilingual school programs that failed to help him at least to some significant part because his single parent mother moved often, which destabilized his education (Smith et. al., 1993, 6-10). He left school at sixteen viewing himself simply as "a normal kid having a hard time" (7).

Orlando had been a student at Literacy Volunteers of Greater Hartford during the early 1980s with negligible results. He came to the Reading Center in January 1990 in a desire to gain increasing control over his life. He had ambitious goals; he wanted to attain his GED certificate which would qualify him to attend auto mechanics school.

Throughout his eighteen month stay he remained matched with a single tutor while participating regularly in small group tutoring. He put in well over 200 hours of tutoring. In the LVA system fifty hours per year is deemed significant. His effort, therefore, represented a major commitment. As his reading ability increased, so did his self-confidence. At several student meetings (Demetrion 1993) he spoke with power and conviction about the transformative role literacy was playing in his life and the importance as well, of the community of learners to whom he belonged. In a word, he recognized that he was no longer alone and desired to stand in solidarity with his peers. Orlando embodied the ethos of the Center in its full, collaborative sense, where learning and community have been joined.

Orlando's learning has been complex and rich and even the visible gains he has made on standardized testing have been extensive. In the test developed by LVA, the Reading Evaluation Adult Diagnosis (READ), Orlando jumped from B to J level in his decoding reading ability, which is roughly analogous to four letter school grades, from first to fifth. There are problems with equating adult literacy learning with school grade equivalencies. Life experience and oral vocabulary of adults are more extensive than with children and are primary tools in developing literacy with adults. Thus, once adults increase their reading ability they invariably achieve a richer literacy experience than children. Moreover, the grade school analogy has negative connotations for many adult beginning readers, particularly with someone like Orlando, who while attending school felt as if he were "nobody." For all its limitations, the READ score increase presented *one* visible manifestation of Orlando's dramatic literacy development. Yet, there was much more to his growth than increased test scores.

Orlando entered the program with traditional goals, and since leaving the program, in his new life first in upstate New York and now in Kileen, Texas, he is well on the way toward achieving them. Yet, it was the learning along the way, while journeying through the Center that is of particular interest in depicting the *process* that enabled Orlando to make significant breakthroughs in his literacy development and self perception. He became a total learner as his hunger for knowledge burned at fever pitch. Throughout his stay, he had expressed a desire for more basic skill development, particularly in mastering the sight-sound relationship of written language, thereby identifying a primary learning gap as a "deficit" in word decoding. His tutors have helped Orlando in this area in which he experienced considerable improvement over time. It is important, though, not to view this in isolation, but as a broader quest as he put it "to know the roots of things" (Smith et. al., 1993, 11).

Orlando is a comprehensive learner whose primary quest is meaning making through a drive to grasp the roots or structures of things. During a schedule change, I worked with him for a while and obtained a good understanding of the sources of his motivation. This appeared evident in the material he studied on automobile mechanics. We read several chapters of a book available at the Center and he obtained more material at the public library. He read the chapters on how the engine works with methodical detail. Some of the vocabulary was above his normal reading ability, but his curiosity was aroused in his search for systematic knowledge. He combined book knowledge with practical work on his own engine, which enabled him to move back and forth from reading, discussion, experience and re-reading in a recursive manner that exactly mirrored the Cycle of Collaborative Learning as depicted in LVA's *Small Group Tutoring* manual (Cheatham and Lawson, 1990, 22). Orlando explained the source of his motivation and learning process in the following way:

> Like in mechanics I take things and I put them in my head. It fascinates me. One of the first cars I had I took it apart, fixed the pistons and it worked. Definitely I want to get into mechanics, on my own or professionally. Now I know I can learn, I can do it. If I could master reading and writing I will do it. When I went to fix my car, with the little I can read, I was able to do it. I like being a grease monkey. There's a lot to know about (Smith et. al., 11).

In order to put his desire to learn about auto mechanics in perspective, it will be helpful to describe what led up to his decision to focus on that with such clarity. Preceding his systematic study of the engine, I discussed with Orlando a five year life plan leading from the advanced groups at the Center to entrance into a GED program with the ultimate educational goal of attending mechanics school. In the meantime he would obtain as much practical experience as he could, and if at all possible, obtain a job in a garage.

As we discussed the plan, I wrote the key points on the white board, enabling him to turn our discussion into a meaningful literacy lesson, further internalizing the content by integrating orality and literacy. Until this time he had no career guidance, so that our lesson at least in some small degree, enabled Orlando to turn a partially believed hope into a concrete plan. This was then followed up almost immediately by our work on the engine. In our lessons, we worked on the complicated vocabulary, but it was the quest for specific knowledge, driven by the plausibility of its attainment and its personal relevance which propelled Orlando's intense motivation. The act of reading became subordinate to the thirst for knowledge. Orlando absorbed much during that period, about auto mechanics, reading and himself. His goals, moreover, have remained coherent and intact (Personal correspondence).

There is more to consider in the quest to understand Orlando's sources of motivation. Despite his great relish in becoming a "grease monkey," he has an indomitable hunger for humanistic knowledge as well. He spent months reading articles about geography and in an interview, expressed interest in the Our Century television series. He enjoys reading history, geography and even science. "All of these things are pretty exciting. It keeps me motivated" (Smith et. al., 12). His goals, interests and aspirations had *expanded* throughout his journey at the Center and that is the critical point. As his learning increased, so did his plausibility structures. He certainly desired to master the basics of decoding and that quest had remained pervasive in his struggle to achieve increasing literacy. Yet as his ability and confidence expanded, he desired much more than that; from learning how to read, he wanted to read in order to learn. He sought to grasp the structure of things, from the basic decoding skills of reading to the intricacies of automobile mechanics, to the world around him to the complex world of his own interior consciousness and his immediate social and cultural experience. At the Bob Steele Reading Center, Orlando obtained something denied him in his earlier schooling experience--an education that greatly expanded his world.

David

David was about nineteen when he enter the program in 1989. He was born and raised on a farm in Guyana, one of twelve children. His mother, a single parent, immigrated to the United States while David remained for several years in Guyana, living first with his "auntie" and then with his grandfather. Formal schooling was not important in his native environment and David attended classes only sporadically. He never learned to read. His family instilled within David the values of hard work and strong sense of loyalty for one another. As soon as he arrived in Hartford, he entered into an adult education program, and soon thereafter, came to the Center (Smith et. al., 1993, 16-24).

David entered the program as a virtual non-reader, although occasionally would recognize the sound of a letter or a small word like "cat." The large class adult education program could not provide the individual attention that he needed.

During the course of almost three years, David has worked extensively with four individual tutors, and participated regularly in the small group tutoring. As of June 1993, he had logged in over 600 hours of tutoring at the Reading Center.

In 1992, David moved up from a high beginning to low advanced group and began to write. He served as a representative on the LVA-CT student council and won an award in Washington D.C. as Connecticut's student of the year in the Coors Brewing Company sponsored Literacy Graduation Day. David has come a long way in his journey at the Bob Steele Reading Center and like Orlando, has been a total participant in its life. His post-test decoding score of D also provides confirmation of his growth. Although his leaps in reading ability have been nowhere near as dramatic as Orlando, *for David* they have proved significant and demonstrate considerable progress on his terms. In this study, I focus on David's early experiences at the Center that has enabled this nonreader to attain the "critical mass" in learning toward becoming an independent, fluent reader.

David studied at the Center for about a year with his first two tutors with little visible gain and no measured increase on the READ test. When he moved to Florida at the end of 1990, David was still at the A level, a complete nonreaders by the standards of the test. His tutors were competent and motivated while David was patient, good humored and open to experimentation. Variously, the tutors worked extensively with phonics and word patterns and then with whole language approaches such as assisted reading. The results appeared negligible. It would have been easy to have concluded that David was one of those people who simply could not "crack the code" of reading, although that was not our judgment.

His first tutor, though, wondered if David had "an undetected learning disability, possibly dyslexia," since it appeared that he could not even master the most basic fundamentals of the reading process, particularly between making the sound-sight connection between the spoken and written word. According to Gerald

S. Coles, "learning disabilities" is an intellectual construct that is highly contestable (1990). That the vast preponderance of emerging adult new readers exhibit a wide array of problems is self-evident to literacy practitioners. What is questionable is the extent to which these should come under the rubric of a "disability" label accompanied by the almost inevitable "stigma" (Beder, 1991) that the problem resides inside the heads of nonreaders.

The problem with this is at least twofold. First, the vast majority of adult literacy programs and supportive social service agencies lack an ability to diagnose any "neurological impairment" which a strict definition of learning disabilities requires (Coles, 1990, 20; Ross-Gordon, 1989, 3). Lacking that, learning disabilities may serve as a catch phrase for some very real problems manifesting in a variety of symptoms, possessing a multiplicity of causations. Second, the learning disabilities label tends to ignore, dismiss or minimize any strong structural definition of illiteracy that interprets it as a symptom of poverty, racism or a manifestation of other related social and cultural factors (Coles, 1990, 25; Hunter and Harman, 1985; Kozol, 1985).

While it is beyond the bounds of this essay and my knowledge to pinpoint with exactness the many complex relationships between environmental and cognitive "causes" of illiteracy, the case studies shed some light on this complicated issue. Orlando, after all, had achieved only negligible benefits in his earlier tutorials. It was only at the supportive climate of the Center that he achieved the breakthrough toward becoming a fluent reader. Yet his symptoms could easily have been diagnosed as learning disabled which his negative self-image might very well have reinforced (Smith et. al., 1993, 2-12).

In my judgment, David's "mental equipment" seemed perfectly fine. He never learned to read during the traditional school years, so consequently, had to acquire a new form of learning from the bottom-up in ways that resonated with his unique personhood. Moreover, David made important breakthroughs during his first year, even though they are difficult to describe and even harder to "measure" in any "standard" way.

I occasionally worked with David during this early period and found his learning style receptive to the assisted reading approach where the learner gradually takes over more of the reading through modeling and practice. David demonstrated the capacity to "catch on" in this manner, although his tutor questioned whether assisted reading represented a form of "mere" memorization. That did not appear the case. Rather, David was engaging the process of fluent reading and was beginning to identify cues that slowly developed reservoirs of knowledge. At this stage, he was seeking schemas or organizational structures that would enable him to assimilate new knowledge (Smith, 1979, 12-35). Memory played a minor role, but short term memory in particular can only hold a few items at a time. Depending even on long range memory is too cumbersome a way to affect fluent reading. According to Frank Smith, making meaning of print is the most viable way to foster literacy (1979, 46). For David, it was the entire environment of the Center that enabled him to make meaning out of print. The supportive climate resembled his family life and his good natured personality tapped into the altruistic motives of his tutors. These factors encouraged the experimentation that was so critical to David's developing literacy. We all struggled to make sense out of David's situation and to search for ways that would tap into his learning.

Focusing on the reading process, itself, whole language advocates maintain that there are a variety of cues: contextual, sytaxtual and phonetic (Altwerger, Edelsky and Flores, 1987, 145). The various tutors who worked with David tapped into all of these in varying emphases in the quest to identify and expand his learning cutting edge. With David, I found kinesthetic cuing particularly effective where for him, perception often preceded cognition. I attempted to tap into his intuition as a primary location of his expanding learning cutting edge. At times when David was unable to identify a word, I merely began to form my lips to initiate the appropriate sound of the word which, given the context of the text often proved effective. Sometimes all David had to do was to look again at a word he missed; that is, to focus his attention upon it. At other times I would partially sound out the word so that he could begin to "feel" the sound-sight connection between spoken and written language well before he understood it in any sustained cognitive sense. Only if he was completely stumped did I supply him with the word. I only drilled him on words he consistently mis-identified, even with an assisted reading approach. Here, I alternated between phonics, word patterns and sight word identification, depending upon what I discerned his most effective learning required at any given time (Root and Colvin, 1987, 19-45).

In effect, I sought to establish a dialogue with David, exploring with him his greatest learning potential at any given time however seemingly minute. Within that context, I attempted to provide him only with the most minimal cuing that he required to stimulate a fluent and constructive learning process. Usually, I stressed assisted reading approaches on the conviction that reading is "caught" at least as much as it is taught which requires a long term process of conscious and unconscious assimilation (Smith, 1979). Moreover, much of the vocabulary from one story to the next was repetitive. It was not essential, therefore, for David to completely master one text (an impossible task at this stage) before moving on to another. Such shifting of texts seemed valuable in order to sustain a sense of moving forward.

In November 1990, David moved to Florida, but came back to the Center the following spring. In Florida he had obtained his driver's license and had begun to break the code of reading. Independently, he was beginning to make the sight-sound relationship between spoken and written language and had mastered a rudimentary sight vocabulary. Whether the breakthrough took place as a result of the specific approaches to reading the Florida program provided or simply through an accumulation of reading practice is difficult to discern. David indicated that the Florida program used techniques and approaches similar to those of the Reading Center. Yet I am not completely convinced that something specific in David's Florida literacy experience did not provide him with a missing link. Clearly, something "kicked in" for him there, yet, David's Florida interlude remains opaque.

When David returned to the Center in the spring of 1991, his progress in reading was becoming discernible, although not yet "measurable" on the READ test. He participated in the small groups and was assigned to his third tutor. By the spring of 1992, he was beginning to read with limited fluency, even though words like "the" still stumped him. Once David internalized the sight-sound connection, he began to draw on phonetic cues extensively, which became his strong suit. His tutor related for example, that he correctly identified the word "include" with the minimal clue of "in." Context clues may have been operative here as well, although his tutor stressed David's increasing phonetic ability as a dominant learning strategy.

By 1993, David was able to read with intermediate fluency. Although independently, he post-tested at level D on the READ test which translates to about a second grade reading level (Colvin and Root, 1982, 47), he reads at a considerably higher level in the small group setting. He reads slowly, yet with a flow. He has made considerable progress since 1990. He has drawn on his reading ability at work, packing meat, and also, in reading road signs. He works independently at the Center while waiting for his tutor or group. Recently, he has advanced into some of the higher level groups. He writes now, and spells with reasonable accuracy. His "inventive spelling" is instinctively sound. He desires to progress further and has the capacity for it.

David enjoys a variety of topics focusing on work, culture, personal development and human interest. His interests have been more diffuse than Orlando's because his life goals are not as sharply focused. Neither has he endured the intense alienation, self-doubt and pain that had marked Orlando's life experience. For both of these students, the Reading Center's environment has provided the necessary support to sustain their efforts over long periods of time. In David's case, his warm supportive family has provided him with the emotional sustenance to take a relaxed, gentle approach to learning. The Center has been able to accommodate both Orlando's intense drive for learning and David's more gradual unfolding.

Angelo

Angelo was in his mid-twenties when he entered the program in January 1990. His scores on the READ test indicated that he was a complete non-reader, but his G level post score, interpreted roughly as fourth grade reading ability, raises questions about the accuracy of the pre-test. He may have been nervous when taking the test or he may have simply needed small amounts of practice to re-cue the reading knowledge that he had possessed while attending high school. Angelo had worked at Pratt and Whitney Aircraft in East Hartford and had seen a profile of Reading Center student, Derrick Matthews, in his company newspaper. He felt he needed to master reading in order to advance at work and that there was a danger that he could lose his job if he did not attend to his reading problem soon.

Angelo was born in Italy and moved to the United States when he was young. He was educated in the Hartford school system and graduated from Buckley High School. He enjoyed content area courses more than those which focused exclusively on reading and writing because of his limited English literacy. Angelo entered the

Reading Center program "with an open mind." He tried "everything else and got nowhere. I might as well give this place half a chance and see where it goes."

In his initial interview Angelo expressed a mild sense of resignation, laced with guarded optimism that he could in fact learn to read. His high level reading comprehension score led me to believe that he could make considerable progress given a sustained two or three year commitment, notwithstanding his A level decoding ability score. Angelo grasped that and seemed willing to us "half a chance."

Contrary to Orlando and David, Angelo had only participated in individual tutoring. In high school he endured many negative social experiences in the classroom setting and carried that legacy with him even to the highly supportive climate of the Center's small group programs. I did not inquire whether or not his high school experience included antagonism over race and ethnicity that he may have transferred consciously or unconsciously to the Center. In any event, Angelo has been highly bonded to his tutor, Helen and had taken no advantage of the Center's setting for multiple tutoring opportunities.

Angelo's test score increase seems to indicate that he has made rapid progress. This is particularly noteworthy since he has worked only with his individual tutor. He has put in fewer hours than Orlando and David, experienced the teaching style of only one tutor and has missed out on the many advantages of working collaboratively with his peers. However, Angelo completed high school. Participating in an adult literacy program may have allowed for a re-stimulation of skills he may have in part learned previously which he could hone in on and refine in a safe, supportive learning climate. Orlando and David, on the other hand, never learned to read in school and for them, adult literacy development had to emerge from the bottom, up.

This is not to claim that Angelo left high school as a fluent reader. His rapid gains indicate that he may well have absorbed in school partial components of independent reading, but probably was not able to put them together in a coherent and consistent fashion. Other high school graduates have participated in the Center's program and invariably have possessed some mastery of fluent decoding with significant "deficits" in specific areas. A definitive diagnosis of Angelo's reading history is beyond the bounds of available evidence, although certain factors at least *appear* evident: a) Angelo had attained some proficiency in reading in school; b) he probably had not attained fluency in any significant and sustained way; c) his social experience in school, possibly related to racial and ethnic antagonism, was negative; d) throughout his schooling experience into adulthood he has sustained a negative self-concept on his ability to attain literacy. This is somewhat speculative and open to further evidence and interpretation, although in my view these factors seem to have played a critical role in Angelo's life experience as an emerging adult reader and writer.

Throughout his efforts toward becoming literate, Angelo has sought stability which at times has interfered with a somewhat inhibited drive for transformative mastery that requires a degree of risk taking into unknown areas of learning. Angelo's stated reason for entering the program was job related, but his tutor senses that his most compelling motive has revolved around a quest to overcome his sense of embarrassment over his perceived inadequacies. On the one hand, Angelo has demonstrated a need to control the pace of learning so that he can assimilate it according to his current abilities. On the other hand, he has expressed a desire to transcend those abilities, but a a sense of shame seems to limit his willingness to take creative leaps in learning that could expose his current weaknesses.

The dominance of stability appears evident in his tutoring routine as described by his tutor:

1. Angelo talks to Helen about his day.
2. Tutor and student read something simple and work on words.
3. Angelo writes in his diary.
4. They read the on-going assignment.

Helen thinks that Angelo is progressing but he does not seem enthusiastic about the actual learning process. Angelo works diligently on his lessons in session, but Helen is perplexed that he engages in no independent reading at home. The main narrative Angelo selects, usually action or adventure related often takes several months to complete and he does not want to move on to something else until he has finished a particular piece. Both Angelo and Helen feel comfortable with the process, but neither are inspired by it.

Angelo's interview confirms Helen's observations in many ways. He attributes his success to the sensitivity of his tutor. "Helen's a very nice woman. She's patient with me--not pushing me into it." Angelo's advice to new tutors emphasizes this concern. "Be understanding of their (the student's) needs. Don't push them into something they're not able or willing to do. Help them, but not too much, because they have to learn on their own. Treat them as a regular person." Angelo has admitted that he has only completed limited amounts of homework in part because he interprets assignments as external pressure that he feels compelled to resist. He has also sensed that if homework became an issue between he and Helen, it could adversely affect his learning during the tutoring sessions. This inhibition perhaps relates to Angelo's need to associate the literacy learning process with a warm emotional climate which Helen provides, where homework induces a sense of the isolation and inadequacy, reviving his earlier experience of schooling.

On the surface, Angelo has adopted a decontextualized view of literacy, viewing reading essentially as the ability to decode the world of print. It appears that he subscribes to the "autonomous" view without much regard to the significance of content nor of the complex ways that literacy and life experience interact. Angelo's discussion of his diary entries seems to reinforce such an impression. When I asked him what he liked about writing in his diary, he stated that it reinforced his spelling skills. I pressed him to think more critically about the diary as a tool to evaluate his life experience. He perceived the diary as a form of remembrance, but only in the sense of how his spelling evolved over time. His commentary on the stories he liked to read about, "burglary, robbery and cars" also seemed superficial which decontextualized literacy acquisition from some of his more deeply rooted life concerns.

It seemed evident in his interview that he had deeper concerns. Notwithstanding the action oriented interests listed above, a more potent source of motivation emerged from our discussions. "Basically, I'm hungry for knowledge. In order to do that (to learn) I have to read." As the interview unfolded, some of his specific learning quests emerged. He expressed an interest in history, current events and environmental issues. He spoke about the destruction of the Amazon forest. "They're destroying it, but a lot of plants are (needed for) medicine that can cure just about anything." He expressed a desire to learn more about politics and the economy in order to draw his own conclusions about the significant issues of our time.

I also pressed Angelo to reflect on the relationship between literacy and some of his more practical life concerns. His desire to become an independent reader has been in part rooted in a quest for self sufficiency. Specifically, at work he wanted to be able to write in order to obtain credit for an idea of his own. He desired the skill to present his ideas "in a fashionable way to the boss." I encouraged him to reflect more specifically on the significance of writing as a form of workplace communication and his response suggested a sophisticated understanding of organizational behavior. "Right now, I'm limited. I have a lot of knowledge, but I can't put it down." I asked him why he could not simply present his ideas verbally. He responded that in the modern workplace "speaking isn't good enough." Angelo did not elaborate further, but it seemed that he was attempting to come to terms with the increasing formality of the workplace toward bureaucracy and administration. In order to function well in that world, an employee needs to know how to access the various chains of power and authority in the organization. Speaking afforded him only the opportunity to interface with his co-workers and boss. Writing would give him the ability to develop memos, reports, plans and proposals that could attract attention throughout the higher echelons of the power structure in the workplace.

Angelo possesses some deeply rooted motives that have propelled his quest for literacy. Yet, they have not appeared readily evident on the surface. His overt behavior has seemed tenuous as reflected in part in the topics he has chosen to read about which are not those most compelling to his life's concerns. Something seems awry. Helen's observation that overcoming embarrassment is a major concern of Angelo's, provides a clue. Angelo needs to work at his own pace so that he is not pushed beyond his comfort level no matter how deeply he desires to expand his abilities. Although difficult to discern for certain, Angelo's negative socio-emotional experience in high school may have reinforced a compulsion to seek comfort at the expense of a more potent quest for mastery. There is some reluctance on the part of Helen to push Angelo into more adventurous learning which could jeopardize the fragile stability that has developed over a two year period. Neither Helen nor Angelo are completely satisfied with the situation.

There seems to be something more at work, for which a clue can be found in Angelo's schooling experience, where he made the distinction between content mastery and learning to read and write. From his interview, it appears evident that Angelo knew what he wanted to learn, but has not identified much *direct* relevance between his ambitions and the *content* of his literacy lessons which remain essentially mechanical and superficial. He appears to have adopted the "autonomous" view of literacy that focuses on decontextual skill development that in turn enables him to apply such "skills" when and where he so chooses without any external pressure to "perform." This may represent a deeply rooted need for security and control that can not be lightly tampered with, particularly, since, as it appears, comfort seems more fundamentally important to Angelo than mastery, although he desires the latter, as well. Both his need for comfort and his decontextualized understanding of literacy appear to have inhibited a unified quest for complete literacy mastery that have characterized the journeys of Orlando and David.

Angelo has made much progress and the match between he and Helen in many ways should be viewed as successful. Angelo has increased his reading ability significantly according to the standardized test score in approximately 100 hours of tutoring. He had also begun to utilize his emerging literacy in practical ways at work. Moreover, his confidence has improved. "Instead of I can't do it, I can do it."

These represent important achievements as does the durability of the match. Angelo has accomplished much at the Reading Center but has not yet utilized literacy as a powerful lever to tap into the cutting edge of his own most powerful learning dynamics. In order to accomplish this he will need to take some risks and identify new learning as a more powerful motivation than his fear of failure. Whether this is possible for him in the near future is difficult to say. It needs to be kept in mind that Angelo is very much "in process," and the Center seeks to encourage his literacy development in whatever paths he follows.

John

John is an African-American who was raised in North Carolina. He moved to Hartford in the early 1980s. In his interview, he did not offer much personal information and I chose not to probe more deeply than what he comfortably chose to disclose. John is in his early forties and does not work on a regular basis, although he obtains odd jobs periodically. He stated that he wanted to improve his reading and writing first before he tackled the job market. Although there may be some rationalization in this, John is an extremely sequential learner which may be indicative of his psychic need to attain mastery in literacy first before pursuing a vocation. My sense is that John has experienced considerable disorganization in his life and that it is only with great difficulty, deliberateness and much support that he has been able to establish order in his life by concentrating on one issue at a time, where he senses a chance at mastery. In that he is far from alone.

John had been active with LVGH for a number of years before coming to the Reading Center in 1991. He worked with two tutors who met him at the public library, but for various reason the matches broke up. John maintained that job changes of the tutors had accounted for the termination of the matches. There may have also been communication gaps between John and his tutors on missed tutoring sessions that may have contributed to terminations as well. Whatever the reasons, John was in danger of "falling through the cracks" of the LVGH system had there not been a centralized site with a flexible small group program that could help him sustain his commitment toward becoming more literate.

John's library tutors may have played a significant role in shaping his perception of the *process* of literacy learning. Those tutors were trained in the standardized methodologies of the LVA tutor workshop in the mid-1980s which laid much emphasis on basic skill development, including phonics, word patterns, and sight word memorization at the expense of more holistic approaches to literacy that the national agency has become committed to in recent years (Cheatham and Lawson, 1990; Cheatham, Colvin and Laminack, 1993).

It is important to note that even in its traditional format, the LVA tutor training emphasized an integrated approach to literacy development. Notwithstanding the emphasis on basic skill techniques, the training also encouraged the use of language experience stories that draw upon a student's verbal language which the tutor would convert into text to serve as the basis of a lesson (Colvin and Root, 1987, 1987, 19-20). This represents a whole language approach that grounds literacy development within the experiential framework and vocabulary of the student. Nonetheless, the traditional training remained heavily weighed toward basic skill development, often reinforced by trainers who prioritized techniques over integrated approaches to literacy development.

In practice, many tutors modify the training in response to the actual needs and learning styles of their students. John's tutors, however, seemed to have drawn extensively on basic skill development which may have conformed to his earlier schooling experience. John's advice to new tutors is telling. "You gotta learn them the vowels. You gotta make out some flash cards." John's tutors did not completely ignore contextual learning since some of his lessons focused on road maps. Yet, according to John's recollection, the primary emphasis in instruction remained grounded in the building block mastery of basic skills which has made an enduring impression on his consciousness.

When John entered the Center he regularly participated in the Saturday small group session and less often, in group sessions during the week. John tested at the J level on the READ test, although he exhibited a variety of "deficiencies" in complex word decoding, comprehension and writing. Despite having achieved the highest level of attainment on the LVA test his learning was uneven and he would require much practice in order to make significant improvements. He participated little in the discussions accompanying group reading assignments and seemed impatient to get back to the task at hand as he interpreted it: decoding the words on the page. I found disconcerting what appeared to me the contextual void by which this fairly advanced reader approached literacy. Often, while waiting for a tutoring session, he would pick up any piece of reading material which he attempted to read without any particular grasp of its content or any significance of one text over another. I found this practice troubling, yet I restrained from intervening once I realized that John did not share my understanding of whole language theory. Once I became convinced of John's commitment to the program, I assigned him to an individual tutor. Soon thereafter, he completely dropped out of the small group program.

His tutor, Liz, had developed an effective program for John which combined much structure with reading for meaning and significance. She also included structured writing exercises from selected reading passages which has worked well with John. What emphatically did not work was "process writing" where a student writes free form following a stream of consciousness and relying on "invented spelling" and dashes in order to effect fluency of prose, followed by revision and editing (Colvin and Root, 1987, 21-23).

Process writing parallels whole language reading theory which stresses the value of literacy as a meaning making activity. Instead of laboriously focusing on the correct spelling mastery of every word, impossible for most low-level literacy students, process writing encourages cutting edge text construction in which the writer is personally invested. Of less interest is the finished product than "on keeping the entire process itself going, even when and especially when semantic meaning may be breaking down. The challenge for writers and readers is not merely how to make a text make sense but how to make what they are doing make sense. From a process perspective we see that the essence of literate orientation is knowing what to do now" (Brandt, 1990, 38). From this perspective, literacy is viewed not as mastery of the "autonomous" text, but an intertextual process which mediates the world of print and the life of the learner. It is the process of learning itself which ultimately provides the basis for writing competency (Coe, 311). Skill development is not ignored, but neither is it viewed as the most compelling literacy task. The emphasis, instead, is enabling the student to express "voice" (Giroux, 1988). In the process, correcting mechanical errors will naturally follow.

The process orientation resonates with a great number of students in providing them with a semblance of fluent writing even while possessing only a rudimentary grasp of reading. It requires risk taking and the willingness to tolerate imperfection. John resisted process writing not because he had nothing to say, but because the gap between what he could and desired to express seemed so wide that it appeared futile for him even to begin. "You got to know how to spell the words to write. You got to practice, sound the words out and memorize and listen to the sounds. You got to know the sounds of the letters." This common sense perception inhibited John from operating out of the process paradigm. More fundamentally, his process required another approach.

Nonetheless, John would never learn to write by memorizing lists of words, but only by actively using them in ways that tapped into his own experiential framework. Liz established an intermediate solution between John's desire to master spelling before beginning to write and the process approach which emphasized text creation preceding skill mastery. The assignments she selected for reading included a couple of lines for writing that only required a sentence or two. With much prompting from Liz, John tackled those structured exercises and has attained a limited mastery in the area of writing, although his major preoccupation still remains with correct spelling.

Liz's selection of *Champions of Change: Biographies of Famous Black Americans* (1989) represents an excellent selection of materials for John in that it combines interesting biographical material on major African-American leaders, along with a wide range of skill work, including vocabulary development and short writing exercises. By working with this text Liz has responded to John's need for structure while simultaneously concentrating on reading for meaning and value.

John is a fluent reader and is one of the top decoders at the Reading Center. At one time I had been concerned that John would have trouble linking the words on a page with any significant meaning making process; what Charles Schuster refers to as the distinction between sentences and utterances. "Sentences are inert; utterances are interactive, intertextual, transformative" (1990, p. 230). Liz's sensitive tutoring had accomplished much in enabling John to begin to see that the power of literacy lies in its meaning rather than in the decontextualized word or workbook sentence.

Some time ago, I worked with John and two other students. I was impressed with the ease of his reading which had improved dramatically since the last time I worked with him. John's active participation in the discussion surprised me as much. When I asked him a question, he asked for clarification before responding. He also explicitly stated with some encouragement from me, that without understanding, reading was pointless. The balance Liz developed between John's sequential need to prioritize skill development with reading and writing for understanding and purpose was beginning to see results.

The extent to which the value of reading for meaning is a new perception for John is difficult to discern. His stated purposes for wanting to become literate ranged from employment to broad cultural and social understanding. "Reading the newspaper is important to me so I can know what's going on in the world." He even expressed some aesthetic purposes in attaining the ability to write his own music.

Like Angelo, however, John has tended to split the *process* of becoming literate which he views as basic skill mastery from its purposes in attaining practical and personal knowledge that he believes will enhance his life. With the assistance of a sensitive and able tutor, John has begun to venture out into more dynamic learning, although by 1993, I believe, he had not yet made the paradigmatic shift in his interpretation of literacy from decoding to meaning making.

During the summer of 1992 John began to miss some of his tutoring sessions. When Liz and I asked John whether he wanted take a break or cut back on the sessions, he affirmed that he desired to continue with this twice weekly meetings. My sense is that John's motive for participating in the program had become partially opaque. He still desired to maintain his connection with Liz, his but his need for regular participation was not as compelling since he has acquired basic decoding fluency even though he still needs much work on writing. My hunch, though, is that John may need to re-define his motives for learning. Meanwhile he has recently returned to a basic skills emphasis by working on math. This is important and holds John's attention for the time. Yet, it also delays a concentrated focus on shifting his literacy work from decoding to comprehension, meaning and purpose. Whether John will make such a leap may depend on whether he defines meaning-making as the next sequential step to master, leaving skill work in the background to concentrate more on understanding and processing texts and their fundamental connections to his vital life experiences.

Concluding Remarks on the Process of Becoming Literate

Susan L. Lytle argues that "documenting changes in literacy practices with adult learners over time is obviously a complex process" (1991, 125). It is particularly difficult to pinpoint what she refers to as the "micro-practices" or "the more specific moment-to-moment transactions learners have with their texts" (1991, 125). For the purposes of this study, I have rejected such a minute analysis of process in favor of a more *historical* evolution of literacy learning within individual lives over a significant amount of time. This study views *the ways* by which adults become increasingly literate as a psycho and socio-linguistic phenomenon that links learning to emerging self-perception, integrated within a variety of socio-emotional support systems that are particularly relevant to specific learners.

The case studies, although not comprehensive, illuminate important aspects on the process of becoming literate in adulthood. They point firstly to the uniqueness of each learner's existential experience and to some of the particular factors that have led to variable success. For Orlando, a fundamental process which facilitated his literacy development focused on an ability to connect reading with content learning in areas that resonated with his needs, interests and aspirations. Achieving a breakthrough in the sound-sight relationship between the spoken and written word, played a pivotal role in David's emerging literacy. A supportive tutor has played a major role in enabling Angelo to begin integrating the various pieces of the reading puzzle which had in large part eluded him throughout public schooling. For John, a concentrated emphasis on basic skill development had provided him with the ability to become a fluent reader of texts.

Secondly, they point to the centrality of the Bob Steele Reading Center as an effective adult literacy learning *environment* that has enabled these and many other students to develop. Orlando and John had "fallen through the cracks" of the decentralized LVGH tutoring system until the Center provided a way for them to reconnect with the program. During his tenure at the Center, Orlando had a schedule conflict that could have derailed his commitment, but the program's flexibility enabled him to continue without interruption. The Center's small group tutoring program sustained Orlando's, David's and John's participation when individual tutors were not available. Without the Center, it would have been difficult to locate and place David's four tutors who have worked with him over the past three years. Without such an extensive commitment, David would never have made the breakthroughs he required to become a fluent reader. The Center has also provided Angelo emotional support during periods of transition and difficulty which had threatened to jeopordize the continuity of his work. The social and emotional support provided at the Center has made a significant contribution in lessening a sense of isolation and alienation that often accompany adult new readers. Such support is critical in sustaining long term commitments to literacy.

The point is not that the Bob Steele Reading Center represents anything like an ideal environment for adult literacy learning. It has its own systemic "cracks" and has not proven viable for all students. A study of those students who dropped out of the program would be much different than the one currently told and neither more nor less legitimate. What I am underscoring is the importance of a supportive learning environment as a critical, often overlooked factor in adult literacy learning and the relative effectiveness of the Reading Center in providing that, particularly for students for whom a centralized site is physically and psychologically accessible.

Thirdly, all of the students in the case study and the overwhelming majority of those who have come to the Center have desired to achieve mainstream goals and aspirations through literacy. They have sought decent employment, additional education, practical social skill enhancement, personal growth and a quest to learn more about themselves and the world around them. Yet, their paths to achieving literacy remain highly particular. Each of the students in the case studies possesses a unique learning style that until their participation at the Center had not been authenticated in formal schooling environments. While mainstream, the goals of these learners have also been integrative, reflecting not only the desire to "function" more proficiently, but to become more fully human.

Fourthly, the attribute of success is determined by the learner which corresponds to LVA's learner-centered philosophy (Cheatham and Lawson, 1990, 2). Both Orlando and Angelo have learned at a much faster rate than David. Yet *for David*, his learning has been as significant as theirs. By their own standards, documented by *some* external evidence, all of the students in the case studies have *experienced* their own literacy development in significant ways and it is such felt change which sustains the quest for literacy over long periods of time through challenging life episodes.

Any separation of the processes and the goals of literacy instruction is necessarily artificial, since the underlying dynamic of motivation requires a stimulation of the ways of learning with a need to link them to outcomes students find as inherently valuable. Yet, some students identify as their goal, the mastery of basic skill development. For other students such as David, goals remain fairly diffuse and emerge almost imperceptively out of the learning process through the evolution of time. For Orlando, on the other hand, identifying particular goals reinforced a desire for enhanced basic skill development as well.

A comprehensive discussion on process could expand almost indefinitely into the "infinite micropractices" that Susan Lytle and her colleagues are beginning to discover (1991). In order to trace the evolution of the adult literacy learning cycle, however, it seems appropriate at this time to shift the focus towards the content, outcomes and goals of literacy instruction. Notwithstanding this shift, the complex relationships among social and emotional experience and literacy learning remain salient.

(4)

The Content of Literacy Instruction

The identification of literacy content does not necessarily point to goals, but it gives witness to the varied interests that spark adult literacy learners along the way toward increasing literacy. It provides clues in identifying sources of motivation and serves as an intermediary link between the process of learning and desired outcomes. The identification of content will draw on three sources: a six month instructional log, a student writing anthology and student interviews.

Reading Center Instructional Log

During a six month period in 1990, I kept an instructional log that detailed approximately 150 basic literacy tutoring episodes. These are direct observations of individual and small group tutoring matches. I focused on whatever I thought was most salient in a given situation: often content, sometimes approach and occasional comments about a student's progress. Several students were tracked for seven or more episodes and many received at least three or four entrees. The primary value of the log was that it provided a composite slice in the life of the program and a wide view of interests that many students possessed at least according to the material they selected.

A few examples from the log illustrate its variability: (There was) "much emphasis today on assisted reading approach. He has progressed much in this manner. For writing he is copying sentences. His notebook is quite thorough, well organized and an invaluable source of continual review and historical record of progress over time."

While that entree focused on progress, others stressed using literacy skills in practical daily living. "Orlando reports that he has been reading stories to his son for the past couple of months." Or, "Margretta is studying for her nurse's aid certificate." "Derrick is studying job benefits pamphlets," while "David worked on drivers license material."

Broader uses of literacy were also identified. Orlando, for example, made a breakthrough in self-perception when he "wrote an essay on the problems of bilingual education. He told the tutor this was the first time he wrote anything that made sense and will share it with his family." Meanwhile, Willie wrote a letter to all of Connecticut's congressmen in protest of Representative Daniel Rastenkowski's proposal to put a cost of living freeze on social security benefits. Willie's tutor, at the time, a staff member for Senator Joseph Lieberman, helped him in making the decision to write. Yet it was Willie who received the material on the proposal and brought it to the tutoring session for deciphering and discussion.

Other incidents mention obtaining library cards, studying for the GED, writing editorials, working on basic skills, reading children's literature, studying the lives of famous African-Americans, working on personal budgeting, completing first books, doing crossword puzzles, learning about jobs, reading articles on critical social issues, and other topics. These do not represent random assignments simply designed to teach decoding skills. They are indicative of the wide curiosity which adult literacy learning sometimes provokes, creating at times what one psychologist refers to as a *flow experience*:

> The first phenomenological condition that separates a flow experience from everyday consciousness is the merging of action and awareness. The mind slips into the activity as if actor and action had become one. The duality of consciousness which is typical of ordinary life disappears: we no longer look at what we are doing from the outside; we become what we do. (Cszentmihalyski, 1990, p. 127).

It may be difficult to verify the existence of such an ineffable phenomenon as a "flow experience," but becoming literate is viewed at times similar to a "born again" religious conversion in its life shaking significance for particular learners (Matthews, 1993).

Although not as earthshaking, perhaps, powerful motivational drives may have stimulated something like a "flow experience" as Manuel complemented his study of an automobile manual with accompanying video tapes, with print and visual material mutually reinforcing the learning process. Derrick also tapped into some powerful sources of intrinsic motivation while completing a third draft to his essay, "Working On My Dreams" that included the following expressive line: "My body grew tired and my mind became painful from too much thinking. My mind became more and more engulfed with thoughts I could not explain or could not understand" (Smith 1991, 92). Deep sources of motivation accompanied Gary session after session while studying for his GED, and with Orlando as he made breakthroughs in his writing.

However mundane much of this content may seem to an outside observer, to the learners it was often of great significance. For some students such learning may have served as sign-posts of emerging knowledge that often had remained underdeveloped or non-existent for years (Matthews, 1993). In many of the observed tutoring incidents as well as those countless unobserved sessions, the process and content of literacy instruction became intimately connected. Increased decoding mastery often became enmeshed with enhancement of the symbolic imagination and the expanding life experiences of adult literacy learners in their quest for knowledge and power in the practical, personal and socio-cultural realms.

A more systematic review of the log further clarifies the varied contents of literacy instruction at the Bob Steele Reading Center and its role in stimulating motivation. Both basic skill decoding and purely personal reflection received only minor attention, while the majority of tutoring episodes focused almost equally on practically oriented or socio-cultural topics, mediated through personal experience.

Since only twenty episodes were focused on basic skill development, the vast majority utilized literacy contextually, as a means of attaining knowledge and information, however varied.

Only a few episodes focused on autobiographical themes which I found puzzling since there is such an emphasis in adult literacy on language experience approaches and personal reflection. The survey, however, concentrated mainly on individual tutoring episodes and contained very little from the writing clinic from which much of the program's autobiographical writing emerged. The log was also completed before *Welcome To Our World* became available which proved a major stimulus for personal reflection.

Practical Literacy

I prefer the term practical over the more commonly designated "functional" literacy to highlight a more organic connection between specific skills and aptitudes *particular* students concentrate on within the broader contexts of their life goals. By contrast, functional literacy defined in major policy studies (Chisman, 1989; 1990) and in much of the published adult education instructional material emphasizes universal "competencies" drawn from the 1975 Texas-based Adult Performance Level (APL) study. The APL study identified five major areas of competencies for adult basic learners to master--occupational knowledge, consumer economics, health, community resources, and citizenship and the law. Such areas of knowledge, potentially could lay a foundation for a comprehensive adult literacy curriculum if viewed as a flexible framework, allowing for shifting foci in response to the diverse needs and interests of learners in specific communities. Instead, the conclusions of the APL study have tended to be adopted by certain state departments of education in their entirety. In California, for example, a competency based adult curriculum had been instituted by their state department with the

Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS) which has been paralleled in Connecticut with the Connecticut Adult Performance Program (CAPP) (Alamprese, 1993, 9). Both of these initiatives are modeled on the content areas and priority competencies of the APL study with only limited local variation.

In addition to this tendency to universalize the "competencies," the APL study ignores fundamental areas of adult experience which should serve as a provocative foundation for literacy education. "The excluded objectives include stimulation of imagination, sharpening and extending memory, reflecting on one's place in the world, cultivating skills in interpersonal relations and expressing creativity" (Hunter and Harman, 1985, 18). The principle problem with the functional paradigm is that it reinforces the "deficiency" thesis of literacy and identifies the primary tasks of adult literacy education as survival and "adjustment" to the status quo (Lankshear, 1993). Adult literacy learners, are complex human beings who possess a broad range of learning needs, interests and aspirations in many areas of life. Practical needs are grounded in broader life contexts than the mechanistic thinking that underlies the functional paradigm (Fingeret and Danin, 1991).

A survey of the practical content areas identified through the instructional log illustrates this distinction. Willie J., who owns his own construction company, wrote a note with the help of his tutor offering a summer apprenticeship to one of the Center's students. This reflects much more than a functional "competency," but an act of empowerment and potential community building where learners help each other meet real needs in concrete situations. The video Manual had watched on the repair of Volkswagon engines had helped him to refine his craft as an automobile mechanic. He is seeking much more than a mechanistic competency. Rather, he is attempting to develop a practice; what one moral philosopher refers to as an art (MacIntyre, 1981,175-183), which plays an organic role in the development of a person's total identity. Contrast either of these examples with some of the "competencies" identified in programs drawing from the APL study. "Compare price or quality to determine the best buys for goods or services." "Use the telephone directory and related publications to locate information." "Fill out medical history forms." "Interpret employee handbooks." "Interpret a voter registration form." (Tyskiewicz, 1988).

These may represent valuable skills for specific people, but as universal competencies they are at best, abstractions which prioritize a certain form of "information processing" with a tendency to slot people into ascribed social roles. Lacking is any acknowledgment of the centrality of personhood, the role of individual autonomy in decision making and the importance of community and collaboration in the adult literacy experience. What comes across in the competency model is a vision of the adult literacy learner as a deficient functionary of the post industrial society whose predetermined task in life is to inhabit the lower strata of the social and economic order (Lankshear, 1993). A focus instead on practical-oriented literacy places occupational and other "survival" issues within the broader life contexts of individuals and groups of people and prioritizes specific needs as they are identified in time and place by particular individuals.

Socio-Cultural Literacy

The socio-cultural topics identified in the log exhibit a wide range of interests. They include stories on boxing to such articles as "Trail of Tears," on the forced Cherokee migration from Georgia in the early nineteenth century (Malone,1981). They include folk tales, children's stories and essays on famous African-Americans. Several students read extensively from the Bible or read Bible stories. One student read selections from escaped slave Frederick Douglass' first autobiography, *Narratives* (1968). That same student wrote a religious song, entitled

Jesus (Smith, 1991, 72). Another student read an article on the African-American Hugh Scott, Dean of Hunter College and in another piece, read about the actor Danny Glover.

One pair of students read an essay called "Speak English My Ninos," about a Mexican teenager and grandfather living in the United States. The teenage youth refused to speak English because he believed it violated his cultural identity. The grandfather ultimately convinced him to reconsider his position on the grounds that English could serve as the vehicle that would enable the teenager to share his cultural heritage with the English speaking community (Malone, 1981).

There are many other examples of the range of socio-cultural themes identified in the log. However, the log discloses little about the meaning of such topics to the particular student. *Welcome To Our World* and student interviews provide a better format to explore the relationship between the content of literacy instruction and the meaning making that various students have derived from it.

Content: The Evidence From Student Writing

The instructional log includes the following entry: "John worked on an essay in *News For You* on the Supreme Court decision that allows police to conduct checkpoint searches on drunken drivers." John's paragraph included a summary of his view on the decision. This represents a bare bones description of John's assignment. John's essay in *Welcome To Our World* provides more information about the role of content in his learning process:

> The Supreme Court had made a decision against drunk drivers because of lots of accidents. And the decision they made up, it will change people's behavior. The Supreme Court is right because a lot of people are dying from accidents caused by drinking and driving. People are right about their privacy but something has to be done about it. Even if stopping for the police at checkpoints is a hassle when you are not drunk, in the long run it is better for everybody's safety (Smith, 1991, 49).

John's understanding of the decision-making powers of the Supreme Court is vague. The "decision" was not a form of legislation. Rather, it upheld a law that allowed for such searches. Another lesson could have focused on the branches of government and their divergent areas of responsibility. Such a civics lesson, however, did not propel the motor of John's cutting edge learning drive. His critical learning task centered on the ability to summarize the news article and to state his own subtle view. He identified the problem, stated his own view, gave recognition to counterarguments and provided reasons for his choice.

John had difficulty holding a job and at the time of program entry, lacked concrete plans for the future. He was a recent high school graduate who exercised some decoding ability, but possessed only extremely limited organizational and articulation skills. His tutor had difficulty working with John since he could not express interest in any particular topic. Also, he missed sessions, often without calling in advance. John could have easily fit the profile of a student enmeshed in "deficiency" lacking the social and cognitive aptitude to succeed in our program. Clearly, his unstable situation made it difficult to match him with a volunteer tutor. I decided to work with him personally since the flexibility of my schedule provided scope for John's fluctuating attendance.

Despite John's difficulty in the area of job stability, he resisted literacy lessons concentrating on "the world of work." Therefore, I focused my early sessions on the Steck-Vaughn text, *Champions of Change: Famous Black Americans* because of its combination of meaningful content and structured vocabulary and writing exercises (1989). John and I struggled "to make meaning" out of the biographies and his articulated responses represented more "fused" efforts between us than independent commentary. I was convinced, though, that his learning edge required such "bridging" support in order to extend his articulation and organization capacities forward. I sensed that this was a more fundamental learning need than stressing self-directed learning since John's intellectual abilities had been so little developed in school. There is a danger in fostering dependency, but pushing a student toward self-directed learning when they have no inclination to move in that way is self defeating (Demetrion, 1993).

Over time, John's decoding capacity increased and within eighteen months he became a virtual fluent reader. He could struggle through long articles in the *Hartford Courant*, although the inordinate time required to complete them sometimes frustrated him. His organization and articulation skills expanded and he even undertook a small amount of writing. In one writing episode, he was able to verbalize his argument, but could not write it down. As a bridging device, I wrote down what he said and presented it back to him in outline form. He was then able to fill in the outline in different words than the original narration.

In the last few months of our sessions, we focused extensively on *News For You*, a newspaper for new readers, and occasionally articles about Hartford in the *Hartford Courant*. These were valuable sessions because they extended John's understanding of his community and city, broadened his knowledge of the wider world, and expanded his sight vocabulary significantly. Furthermore it allowed scope for the exploration of disciplined thought, an activity with which previously John had little formal experience Given this background on John's learning history, his paragraph on the Supreme Court represents a signal achievement.

Over time John felt comfortable with occasional literacy lessons on "the world of work" and much of our informal conversation centered on that. It was not that John was uninterested in the topic earlier; in fact it remained a vital concern. Rather, he needed a broadened educational experience for the development of his self perception which in turn better equipped him for the many work related problems that confronted him. As of this writing (summer 1993), John is enrolled in automobile repair school and is living independently on his own.

With John, a particular topic served a broader education process of expanding his self and world horizon. This has also been the case with other students, although for some, the actual topic selected has had particular salience. Consider the following essay in *Welcome To Our World*:

> Church is a place to worship the Lord. It is very uplifting. Sometimes we have guest speakers. I remember one in particular, the co-pastor of the Baptist Church on the corner of Albany Avenue and Vine Street. He brought the church to life. His message was "somebody ought to say something." The Christians who say nothing are just as guilty as the bad people, with their silence. Somebody ought to say something about the homeless. Somebody ought to say something about babies having babies (52).

Or this piece by Derrick on "The Person I would Like in Public Office":

> The man was not for drugs. He fought against drugs and for better education. This man fought for rights for all people in the United States. He worked for years with the best man who was not violent. He helped organize other people in the states and city to keep their jobs and to learn how to get a job in their own city and town. He got other people to start their own businesses and to get their own houses. He got people to read. The man is a pastor from his home town. He is honest and concerned about others. This well known person helps the poor and homeless to get themselves some kind of aid. His issues about people is to help themselves. The thought is, I am somebody. The great person's name is Jesse Jackson (95).

Both of these essays address some of the most fundamental issues of our times. The authors not only have articulated their views, but have more fundamentally expressed their "voice," resounding with the tensions, hope and power of the African-American urban experience.

The power is carried in the poetics of their prose, reflecting in their writing, the potency of the African-American oral narrative tradition. The cadence of "somebody ought to say something," energizes not only the mind, but stirs the heart, soul and imagination, recalling the collective experience of revival Baptist preaching and the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. Derrick's piece builds on similar themes, but is particularly riveting in the dramatic tension he builds in his narrative. The symmetry of his organization to me seems flawless. Each line builds upon the other as the text becomes increasingly specific. He could have titled the essay, "Why I Would Like Jesse Jackson in Office." Instead, his poetic sense compelled him to build up to the climatic point in his narrative by dropping evocative clues. This is not merely an essay, but the equivalent itself, of a stirring speech, sermonesque, emulating the rhythmic flow of the powerful language of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Jesse Jackson.

These essays provide vivid testimony on the relevance of socio-cultural themes in adult literacy education. John's experience confirms this, as well. For all three authors, personal experience and self-perception have been enhanced through rich socio-cultural learning. The stories these students have told, moreover, lay the foundations for other students to tell of their stories and their worlds in their varied textured nuances which cumulatively help to build community and to enrich all our lives. Whatever else adult literacy education may accomplish, it holds the promise of opening new vistas into rich and provocative personal social, cultural and aesthetic experience. As Patricia A. Graham puts it:

> Literacy enhances our humanity. If we are literate in late twentieth century America, we expand the ways in which we can learn, understand and appreciate the world around us. Through literacy we enlarge the range of vicarious experience, both through our command of written materials and through formulation of new ideas demanded by the rigors of writing and speaking...To learn, to express, to decide and to do...together permit us to become more autonomous individuals, less circumscribed by the conditions of social class, sex, and ethnicity into which we are born (Harman, 1987, 92).

Such deep-rooted human needs cannot be the exclusive province of the social and cultural elite. They represent, the birthright of all people by virtue of our common humanity. Approaches to literacy which empower rather than alienate are urgently needed in our "post-industrial," "post- modern" society. A comprehensive adult literacy curriculum, suffused with provocative socio-cultural themes and topics would make an important contribution toward that cause.

Content: Insight Drawn From Student Interviews

Material from the instructional log and *Welcome To Our World* illustrate the breadth of topics and issues that have aroused the attention of the literacy learners at the Bob Steele Reading Center. They point to significant areas of interest in the personal, practical and socio-cultural realms and provide clues on the interrelationship of varied content areas in stimulating literacy development. Still missing is focused attention on the ways particular students have shuttled back and forth among such interests and its significance in stimulating the learning dynamic. The student interviews help to fill this gap. To some extent, we have witnessed such an interaction in the case study of Orlando's learning history. Nonetheless, a more focused exploration of this theme enables us to evaluate the complexity of adult literacy learning in more varied and nuanced ways.

Patricia

Consider Patricia's brief career at the Reading Center as a summer 1990 participant of the weekly writing clinic. In an interview, she highlighted practical goals in explaining why she entered the program. She wanted to obtain her GED, complete application forms, develop skills for more satisfactory employment and to read and write notes from and to school to help her children. The writing clinic was not intended specifically to meet those needs. It focused rather, on group process skills, comprehension, vocabulary development and expository writing. Indirectly, however the clinic fostered intellectual development that would help Pat in utilizing critical thinking capacities to pass the GED and to develop general communication skills that could be of value on the job or at her child's school.

Pat knew how to tap into Hartford's adult literacy "delivery" system. She had been referred to LVGH from the Connecticut Regional Education Center (CREC)

Work and Learn Center that concentrated more on the specific skills she wanted to develop. Soon after leaving the Reading Center, she enrolled in the YMCA computer based **Read to Succeed** program while maintaining the support of an individual LVGH tutor. Other task specific programs would be available to Pat in Hartford as she increased her basic skill reading and writing capacities. Pat exerted considerable competency in utilizing the city's adult literacy programs to meet her specific needs and interests which any single program has been unable to completely satisfy.

Through the writing clinic, Pat met some of her learning needs, particularly in areas in which she had previously not given much attention. She initially felt more comfortable with the one-on-one tutoring, but the collaborative dynamic of the writing clinic grew on her. She discovered that "We all have the problem; it's not just you who needs the help." Through the solidarity of the collaborative learning experience, Pat gleaned the importance of discussion as a way of increasing understanding. "Sometimes I sit down and read and don't really know what I'm reading. In discussion I can understand more than when I'm (only) reading." The social climate of the group affected her as well. "...It's a nice program. We read a topic, discuss it and write a paragraph. Everybody is friendly. Whatever you need help in, they will help you."

Most of Pat's assignments are not retrievable for analysis in this essay. In one session, however, she wrote a response to a Langston Hughes short story, *Thank You Ma'am*, about a young black youth who tried to mug an African-American woman. This woman befriended him and provided money to buy the shoes he so desperately wanted. Pat would have taken a different course of action:

> I would be so mad that I would chase him down the street for my pocketbook. I was so mad, I picked him up by the collar and told him. "Why you want to snatch my pocketbook? Don't you know you would go to jail?" I

> wouldn't bring him home with me because I don't know him. I don't know what he might do, but I would talk to him (Smith, 1991, 45).

Other topics that summer included autobiographical writing, reflecting on student essays, commenting on articles from *News For You* and an assignment on what love means to you (Matthews, 1993).

Pat's brief participation at the Center makes it difficult to draw definitive conclusions about the relationships among personal, practical and socio-cultural content in her literacy development, but the interview provides testimony on the importance of untapped personal and socio-cultural learning as an important balance to her quest in meeting some very practical needs.

Wayne

Wayne is in his early twenties and recently migrated to Hartford from Jamaica. He is reflective, self-conscious and struggling to make his way in the United States. When his work schedule permitted, he participated extensively in the lower reading level small groups while studying with an individual tutor. Like so many other students, Wayne also feels the groups are important as they help him to realize "you are not alone in this." With his tutor, Wayne worked extensively on basic skill development and preparation for his driver's license exam. He has noticed "lots of differences" in his progress which has helped him in practical ways and with his self-esteem. He feels that his parents can now be proud of him and believes that people will assist him rather than ridicule his low reading ability. It may be difficult to discern with exact precision what he had experienced when he stated "I feel a lot, lot different now. I know I can do it. I just know I can read and write. I know I'm improving." Yet, obviously, Wayne has undergone significant change as a result of some combination of support, actual development in reading ability and the ways in which literacy has helped him in his daily affairs.

Of particular interest was Wayne's response to an article on Martin Luther King, Jr. "It stuck in my mind for two days; I kept thinking about it." There is no further elaboration in the interview, so it is difficult to interpret exactly why Wayne found this so compelling. What King both accomplished and symbolized, however, was the possibility and need for African-Americans to transform history, both personal and social, in King's case through the power of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s. Like King, Wayne seeks to be an agent in his own history instead of passively accepting the weight of oppression and injustice that characterizes so much of the minority urban experience in the United States. Through literacy, Wayne has begun to sense the efficacy of his own potency in a land so different than his native Jamaica.

Wayne seeks inclusion in the American mainstream. His work schedule prevented him from continuing in the program. Still, obtaining steady employment represented one of his primary goals. He is seeking more than this, however. He desires not only to become a home owner, but would like to own more than one home. He has worked diligently at his job and in his effort to pass the drivers' test. Yet, it has been more than simply "functional literacy" that has driven his basic needs and desires for learning. The interview described a letter Wayne wrote to a friend back home who cannot read well. He realizes many people in his hometown cannot read and he wishes he could help them. Wayne is particularly proud of that letter which he wrote with no help. It is the sense of freedom, mastery, and as the letter indicates, social solidarity that Wayne has sought both for himself and for others who share his struggle to achieve literacy.

Elaine

Elaine is also from Jamaica. She lives in Hartford with her son and works in a textile factory that makes seat covers for airplanes (Smith, 1991, 26). She has studied at the Reading Center since 1990 and has worked with individual tutors as well as the advanced small groups. This advanced reader writes extensively although erratically. In the summer of 1992, she obtained her U.S. citizenship and fulfilled one of her goals. Although Elaine seeks to pass the GED, her "main thing is improving my reading which is low."

Elaine places considerable value on the small group tutoring program, along with the collaborative climate of the Reading Center. "You meet a lot of different people. You see you're not alone. You have people (here) a lot like you." Still, Elaine prefers individual tutoring since the tutor can spend more time attending to the specific needs of the student. She cut back on group tutoring when assigned an individual tutor, but has continued to draw on the group tutoring experience as well. She enjoyed one group in particular because "the teacher explained a lot. What we don't understand, we talk about."

Basic skill development is important to Elaine since the "main thing" stimulating her motivation is the desire for increased reading fluency. Even so, she has identified a range of pragmatic and aesthetic purposes that enhanced literacy has begun to satisfy. She now reads road signs with ease, she can read her mail, pay her bills, and write letters. She also shops with more proficiency and reads the small print in the labeling. Previously, she knew what she wanted to buy at the grocery store, but now she can read in detail the nutritional information on the packaging. "I want to know what I'm eating. I want to eat the right thing." She has the tools now to make informed consumer decisions.

Elaine also enjoys reading material of a more humanistic bent. "What I like to read are love stories, Time Magazine and the newspaper" (Smith, 1991, 26). She likes to read about people, particularly human interest stories. She reads with considerable fluency, so "understanding is the main thing for me now." She enjoyed a science fiction story called "The Forgotten Door," because of the strangeness of the character who had no knowledge of common things such as shoes or cars. "He comes from a different world," perhaps just as Elaine is from a different land. Bible reading is also important to her.

Like Derrick, Elaine is a master story teller, although her cadences are softer and gentler reflecting the warmth and closeness of the Caribbean culture shaped more by nature's time than the clock-like efficiency of a "post-industrial" city like Hartford. Consider the beautiful images she has created in the following story, *My Grand Parents*.

> My grandparents are very loving grandparents. They likes and they spoiled their grandkids. They were living in the country. When we visited them, they took us to shops and bought us lots of sweets. Then they took us around their friends. Then my grandparents took us to the pool. They put us into the pool and splashed the water on us.
>
> We stayed there for a while. My grandfather climbed the coconut tree and let us drink the coconut water. After we did that my grandparents sat under a tree and told us about their parents. We all started to laugh. It was getting dark so they took us home. My grandparents sat down in rocking chairs and started telling stories about an old goat and we laughed till we got tired and it was time to go to bed. My grandparents tucked us in our beds (Smith, 1991, 18).

Elaine, now possesses the tools to share with us, the richness of her inner world and cultural heritage. Through her emerging literacy, the world of all who read her work may become enriched.

The evidence presented on content points to the complex interplay among personal, practical and socio-cultural interests among adult literacy learners as they seek meaning through print at home, work, in the community and in the larger world to which they belong. A comprehensive adult literacy curriculum could be developed that allows expression for the full range of these varied and complex interests.

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Outcomes

The categories that I am utilizing in this essay are at times, barely distinguishable. The ways of learning and the content of instruction are often intertwined as are the complex relationships among social, affective and cognitive forces in their intricate interplay as sources of motivation. This is also so in the distinction between outcomes and goals. They flow into and reinforce each other.

By outcomes, I am referring to specific, isolatable achievements that follow in some way as a consequence of literacy development. In this study, these will include test score improvements, definable "life-skill" achievements, and the self-report of students in the interviews and oral history narratives. I discriminate between outcomes and goals which even when specific, serve as sign-posts for more deeply-rooted desires. I also separate implicit, emerging goals that can be better understood as aspirations, from those that are explicit which are similar to outcomes except they are broader.

Standardized Test Scores: The READ Test

Test scores alone provide limited information in discerning the success of particular students (Tierney, Carter and Desai, 1991, 21-37). According to some of the foremost scholars on adult literacy evaluation, standardized testing "fails to capture even a part of the complex interactions involved in teaching and learning" (Lytle and Wolfe, 1989, 65). At best, they depict certain *measurable* improvements over time and cumulatively serve as one indicator in evaluating the success of a program.

They are limited in many ways. First, test scores only demonstrate independent reading ability and fail to measure the "scaffolding" (Cazden, 1992, 131) instructors provide through assisted reading practices and the almost invisible progress that ensues over long periods of time. Second, they fail to distinguish the importance of divergent abilities, motivational levels and needs since the elusive quality of success is grounded ultimately on the uses of literacy and its influence on the self perception of the student (Smith, 1988, 93-108.)

Third, standardized questions and passages fail to gauge the actual reading content students may encounter in their daily lives. Fourth, standardized testing reemphasizes the day school mentality with its competitive psychology which is counter to philosophies of adult literacy that stress self-directed and collaborative modes of learning (Cheatham and Lawson, 1990, 3-5). Finally, students socialized within a schooling model of education, often overemphasize the importance of testing. This is particularly disturbing when little visible gains are achieved even when considerable learning has taken place at the "micro-stage" level. Notwithstanding these critical limitations, post-test score increases are viewed in this essay as one visible measure of growth, since at least for independent readers they provide a rough indicator of progress and because so many students, themselves, often view test score increases at least as a symbol of achievement.

The instrument used at the Reading Center is called Reading Evaluation Adult Diagnosis (READ) developed by Literacy Volunteers of America (Colvin and Root, 1982). It is characterized as a diagnostic test in pinpointing various skill "deficiencies" and is used as an informal measurement of progress determined through the test's sequential reading passages from A to J level. These are not strictly analogous to school grade levels but only "correspond roughly to that encompassed by materials in elementary textbooks" (Colvin and Root, 1982, 47). The authors are fully aware that life experience and interest influence reading ability (46) but are stuck with the grade school analogy since until very recently the agency has not thought through more qualitative ways of evaluating literacy development. As of this writing, LVA is only at the early stages of developing systematic approaches to qualitative evaluation. The agency, thus far, has not resolved the contradictions between its philosophy of self-directed learning which eschews standardized testing as a significant measure of success and an administrative need for uniform data. The identity of LVA is very much at stake on the issue of assessment and evaluation.

The test is predicated on the pedagogical assumptions of reading consultant, Jane H. Root, and the initial eclectic instructional program which has characterized the LVA training throughout most of its thirty year history. LVA's program consists of language experience approaches, drawing text from the spoken language of the learner, sight word memorization and consonant and word pattern exercises. Thus, the program seeks to blend experiential learning with a basic skills approach which views learning as primarily an individualistic, cognitive process (Colvin and Root, 1987).

Nonetheless, during the past five years, LVA has been undergoing immense change in its instructional assumptions, drawing on whole language theory, collaborative group dynamics and process writing which have challenged some of the core approaches of the traditional program (Cheatham and Lawson, 1990 and Cheatham, Laminick and Colvin, 1993.) The agency has been exploring innovative approaches to evaluation and assessment, drawing on qualitative, multi-dimensional factors to achieve more comprehensive ways of understanding and documenting student progress than relying on the single standard of test score increases. Some of these approaches have been incorporated into *Tutor 7* (Cheatham, Colvin, and Laminack (119-122). This study is meant, in part, to lend support for such efforts. Notwithstanding their many limitations, the accumulated test scores documented in the Reading Center's data bank, provide some core information of student growth and broader programmatic development.

Test results provide one source of evidence that long term commitment to literacy learning results in increased reading ability. Of the approximately forty post test scores available, gains in decoding word ability (word recognition) were achieved by all students except one who had mentally retardation. A conclusion that can be drawn is that literacy learning is a natural process, requiring considerable practice and attention. There is nothing inherent in the "mental equipment" of the vast majority of adult literacy students to prevent growth in reading given an appropriate learning climate.

The scores also indicate a variable rate of learning among particular students, regardless of the hours of instruction. A common LVA standard of program effectiveness is that fifty hours of tutoring should result in one grade level of improvement or two letter grades on the READ test. Yet, as the case studies have demonstrated, there are many problems with such a measure of success especially in an individualized, learner centered program. For example, it took David over 100 hours of instruction to make any visible breakthrough on the READ test, while Angelo moved up several letter points in approximately the same time. On the other hand, Angelo proved much more inhibited in utilizing his skills and experimenting with literacy, while David has maximized his full capacities. These factors make it difficult, if not impossible to determine who is the more successful student, a question that is at least implicit when a standard measure of performance is used. The test scores help to document the rate of learning for particular students, but other evidence is required to make a holistic evaluation of individual progress and programmatic effectiveness.

Test scores can also prove valuable in helping to document the overall effectiveness of the program. Literacy Volunteers of New York City (LVNYC) utilized test scores to demonstrate that "program participants reached a plateau after 50 hours of instruction" (Lytle, 1989, 28). LVNYC concluded, therefore, as

Lytle put it, that "the agency should make other options available after the initial 50 hour period," concentrating its efforts more toward reaching new students while establishing linkages with other literacy and adult education providers (29). Establishing such linkages and assisting students to transfer to appropriate programs, represents an important service, particularly for advanced level students. Yet, our documentation leads us to conclude that lower level students can derive benefits well beyond 200 hours of tutoring, and in fact, such time is often required to make significant breakthroughs in even modest literacy attainments.

At the same time, an appropriate learning climate needs to be established that will encourage such a sustained commitment among both the students and the tutors. The development of such a learning environment is more feasible in such a climate as the Reading Center, particularly in juxtaposition to the decentralized LVA instructional model where student and tutor meet as isolated dyads without much direct contact with the program. It has been the flexibility of the individual and small group tutoring, moreover, which has made it possible for students like David, Orlando, Derrick and Patricia to meet a wide array of learning opportunities. This, combined with the collegial atmosphere of the Center, providing emotional and social support, has helped to make it an environment that fosters long term literacy development. Advanced students are encouraged to explore other programs, but the Center has developed a promotion system within its program so that someone like David can commit to a three-to-five year period in one stable environment without experiencing the plateau effect that LYNYC identified after 50 hours of tutoring. Thus, test scores are useful as well in helping to identify some of the long term effects of a program.

Life Skill Achievements

LVGH reports test scores and "life-skill achievements" to LVA-CT. Both represent coded information reduced to a letter or a number. The list of life skills developed by LVA-CT consisted of such achievements as obtaining a driver's license, finding a job, completing a book, obtaining citizenship and transferring to another adult education program. These skills, therefore, are synonymous with certain "behaviors," or "competencies," which may be more or less directly linked to increased literacy proficiency. We thought the list included important outcomes, but required finer categories that more closely proximate the many processes toward becoming increasingly literate. The expanded list, therefore, includes participating in more than one group, writing an essay, moving to an advanced group, engaging in peer tutoring and undertaking the GED pre-test. To humanize the list, I included brief sentence descriptions of the accomplishments in my own "data base."

Seventy-seven students achieved documented life skills and many had more than one listed. They ranged widely in outcome as well. Orlando participated in more than one group, obtained a job and completed an oral history. In the earlier code, job attainment would have been the only identified skill reported which in this case, really had little to do with his literacy development.

Catherine wrote an essay for *Welcome To Our World.* Delores entered Adult Basic Education (ABE), wrote an essay and took the GED pre test. Carol wrote an essay, took the GED pre test, participated in more than one group and moved to a more advanced program. Pat addressed a tutor training workshop, served as a peer tutor, recruited a friend for the Center, spoke at a major LVGH fund raising function and completed an oral history. All of these represent significant achievements which are identified in the expanded code list and point to the complex interplay of social, emotional and cognitive forces operative in the process of becoming literate.

However, sometimes accomplishments can be deceptive. For example, Daniel started his own car detailing business, completed an oral history, participated in more than one group and began writing. He completed over 200 hours of tutoring and had risen from level A to C on the READ test. Yet, for a variety of reasons his participation in the program slacked off and, it is feared, that if he does not continue with the program, his skills may atrophy. Daniel is in process and the significance of his outcomes will be influenced by the progress he makes. If he re-engages adult literacy learning and attains a higher level of literacy, his current accomplishments may have another meaning than if he remains disengaged.

What is significant for Daniel as well as for the other students mentioned is the on-going relationship of literacy development to life experience. These outcomes represent certain signposts on the way toward increasing literacy that have more or less significance for particular students during specific periods of time. Their salience can only be clarified as the life process of these learners unfold. Even the expanded code lists represents only standardized achievements identified by the literacy agency. Self-reported evidence derived from student interviews and oral history narratives, shed light on the subjective significance of specific outcomes. In a program grounded in a learner-center philosophy, these should have particular salience, certainly more so than test scores and coded "life-skill" achievements. To "legitimize" such documentation requires a transformation of the metaphor of literacy evaluation from that of quantification to that of story (Kazemek, 1991; 1992). In "mainstream" agencies like LVA which depend so extensively on corporate and governmental support, such a shift will prove no easy task.

Ethnographic Documentation

Student Interviews

Willie stated that increased literacy allowed him to read shipping tickets at work more easily. It had also enabled him to attain a better grasp of changes at work with "the new regime." Thus, in his ability to read the word, he is also better able to read the world. He has also learned to read road signs, maps and the Bible. These are all significant outcomes. After studying at the Center, Quinten had been able to read the labels on some of the material unloaded from trucks at his job and had obtained more skill in filling out forms. He has also used the public library to find new stories to read. Durante reported that he is able to read portions of the newspaper independently. Maria reads the newspaper and some of the magazines in the doctor's waiting room. This Portuguese born women now is able to converse better in English on the telephone and has developed more confidence undertaking reading and writing tasks. Wayne learned to read road signs and "finds himself looking for things to read rather than avoiding them."

Pat reads menus and road signs. He was especially pleased when he read the name tag of a waitress. Now he can eat what he wants and travel anywhere. Pat, a French Canadian, speaks more fluently in English and reported that he is better able to read a little in French. Pat also reads portions of the newspaper. He does not always decipher every word he reads but feels he understands the gist of a story. Winston reads more items at the supermarket and can read the menu at the restaurant where he works. Anthony says that he can "talk to people better" and "explain himself better" due to his expanded vocabulary and confidence. Thus, orality and literacy are mutually reinforcing with Pat and Anthony and many other students.

Roderick has improved his math skills and has mastered long division. Filling out reports at work is now easier. Roderick has also learned to help himself learn. He brings some of his advanced group work to his individual tutor for additional help. Thus, he utilizes the diverse resources at the Reading Center to meet his specific learning needs. Hector is able to read stories to his young child, is more aware of street signs, and can identify certain words in the newspaper.

Oral History Narratives

While student interviews point out the significance of specific outcomes, the oral history narratives expand upon them in vivid detail. Pat's ability to read road signs and restaurant menus is beautifully underscored by his narrative:

> The other night I went to move my sister-in-law. We took a new road that has been built out to Manchester (I-395) rather than taking the Silver Lane exit. We got on the highway to go home and my wife asked if I knew where I was going. I said yes. I could **read**. I could read the highway signs. It said "Boston" one way and "Hartford" the other. And I was able to do this all my myself. I could find my way home. I felt really good about that. I felt independent because I could find my way home myself simply because now, I can read (Lestz, Demetrion, and Smith, Vol 1, 1994, 94).
>
> Now If I go into a restaurant, I don't have to pretend I am reading the menu, I really read it. My wife used to read it to me. I hated when people were with us or around us because they would know that I can't read and may think I am a dummy. But now I can order food myself. I also can read the paper enough to know about what is going on. To me this is something (Smith, et. al., 1993, 151).

Consider David's on- going literacy odyssey:

> I try to develop myself now. When I see writing on the wall, I try to read it. I try to figure out what it is. I improved a lot to me, since I'm here; I've learned a lot. I read books by myself sometimes. I read newspapers with my teacher. I try to figure out the words. If I can't, she helps me. She makes me stagger couple of times, then I find it.
>
> I feel good for myself. When I see "Exit" and the fire sign outside, I can read it. And I know (emphasis added) I can read it. So I feel good (Smith, et. al., 1993, 23).

David goes on to relate how he turned down a promotion at work because it required reading. Soon after he devised a strategy that enable him to identify various meats that were unloaded from trucks at the grocery story where he worked:

> But now I take the same paper (a check list) from last month. I down all the meat from the truck, just like that. Because it's easy. If you just put your mind to it you can get it...So I think I could read anything in my workplace, read any kind of meat. But if I go somewhere without the paper, or without the boxes, I cannot spell it by my head. I could read it once I see it on the box, I could tell you exactly what it is. It's the spelling (Smith, et. al, 1993, 23).

Both Pat and David entered the program as virtual non readers. Their outcomes may seem modest to the casual observer but are extremely significant *for them*. Through these accomplishments students move toward new horizons in self perception and in the social worlds they recreate. As one student eloquently attests:

> If anything it's brightened up my life. I know that I have come off better than I was. I learned more than I knew when I first started coming. So it inspired me.
>
> I felt down when I first started coming, but now I don't. I feel good about it and about myself. I know I can read much better than I could, and write better than I could. I couldn't even think about writing a letter, then. So I can just say it's been a big improvement. My head's coming up (Smith et. al., 1993, 42).

(6)

Goals

Outcomes represent the visible manifestations of literacy education. Yet, they are part and parcel of the total literacy experience and cannot be sharply demarcated from the processes, the content and the more broadly ranged goals and aspirations that underlie the phenomena of adult literacy education. Throughout this essay I have sought to describe the flow of literacy learning which at best, can only be imperfectly mirrored in a written text that imposes its own abstractions and categories on a process ultimately incomprehensible through language, alone. Much remains elusive even in the effort to penetrate to the core of content and outcomes, particularly in attempting to assess their significance. Such is even more the case in identifying goals and aspirations which by their nature, often transcend stated visible ends.

Nonetheless, an effort will be attempted in the following section in the same manner characterized throughout this study; through "thick description" and my own critical reflection. In this, I am engaging my own struggle with literacy, seeking new forms of meaning as a way of providing more sense to a reality perpetually in process. The work at the Bob Steele Reading Center represents at its best what the religious educator Maria Harris describes as "a community of people come together as a community of hope; a coming together of people, each of whom brings her or his radical particularity as *this* (original emphasis) unique person" (1987, 28), seeking through literacy, personal and collective power to enhance life, itself.

While certain goals may be specific and concrete, others, grounded more deeply in possibility and potential, may also seek to transcend given realities in the on-going process of relating being to becoming. Thus, even in the attainment of a GED or a job, the satisfaction is not always only in the material objects sought as important as they may be, but in what they represent in the psychic and social experiences of particular individuals. These often point to more deeply rooted aspirations that perpetually call people further into life in the on-going constructions of their personal and social identities. However ineffable such aspirations may seem, they very well may hold the keys to some of the most fundamental sources of motivation which may or may not be nourished by the tutoring process.

Explicit Goals

Students seek to achieve a variety of explicit goals upon entering the Reading Center linked to job mobility, educational advancement, helping children with school work, living more effectively in the neighborhood and community, reading the Bible and improvement of reading skills. A perusal of the student interviews, *Welcome To Our World*, and the oral history narratives, shed much light on the specific goals that have motivated particular learners.

Derrick, for example, wanted to become a deacon at the Hopewell Baptist Church which required an ability to read the Bible and other church related material (Matthews, 1993; Smith, 1991, 53). Pedro studied in order to attain a better job (Smith, 1991, 61). Winston wanted a driver's license and "to get a better job so I can make more money" (12). Marva seeks her GED in order to go on to college (24). Elaine wants to become an independent reader "without anyone helping me" (26). Gary joined the program to gain the reading skills necessary to obtain a real estate license, but pointed to something more elusive as well: "Literacy is a means of achieving a new way of life. The ability to read, write, and understand what you are doing will help you not to shy away from anything and deal with the situation at hand" (64).

Dan's story also suggests some of the more personal goals that motivate many literacy students.

> One day I went to work. It was a new job. I was there for two weeks. So that day my boss called me into his office. I was not sure what he wanted. He told me to write a note because I needed a name tag. I was scared. I did not know what to do. I did not know how to write. So I got up and said I had to go to the bathroom. I was so mad at myself. I left the bathroom and went back to his office. He was not there. I took the paper to my office and wrote the note with my dictionary. Thanks to my tutor Tom I can write this essay (64).

The student interviews confirm a similar range of explicit goals as depicted in *Welcome To Our World*. Thus Willie sought skills to pay bills, write checks, read road signs and the Bible. Quinten entered the program because he was "tired of looking at stuff I couldn't read. If I go to school I could learn more than being on the street." Durante identifies reading the newspaper and filling our job applications as important goals. Angelo wants to become an independent reader so that he can learn enough to get by and keep learning after that. He wants to learn how to organize his thoughts and make presentations at work. Pearl wants "to fill out my personal papers (and learn) how to read a cookbook--different things to help me in my old age." She also wants to read the Bible and participate in religious discussions.

Pat wants to obtain a high school diploma. "For me, it's almost a must I'm going to be the first one in my family to finish high school." Pat also wants to read blueprints at work which would provide him with the skills to become a partner in the firm where he is employed.

Ralph is "fascinated with poetry. (It) touches your heart...it has so much feeling and meaning." As his skills develop he would like read more poetry. Ralph also has more practical goals. By improving his literacy skills, he will be able to take the lead in day to day situations which require reading.

The oral history narratives document a similar range of explicit goals that have motivated the adult literacy learners at the Bob Steele Reading Center. Sylvia wants a driver's license and a high school diploma in order to become a hairdresser.

"I have to go to school for that" (Smith, et. al., 1993, 52). Florence identifies as one of her main purposes, the ability "to read more for my kids....I'm more interested in reading right now so I could help my kids more" (Oral History draft).

As noted above, Orlando sought practical goals of GED attainment and the desire to become a mechanic. Yet, he also points to the quest for learning as one of his deepest sources of motivation:

> I read about history and geography, and about the planets. It's a thrill to go back in time and live in that time. I find that interesting and fun. I like to know about nature and stuff, human and animal. All these things are pretty exciting. It keeps me motivated. It's too bad I wasn't thinking before, when I was in school. I've been cheating myself. You miss out on a lot you should be doing, things you like doing, because you can't read and learn about it.
>
> About a year ago I really started to think about how I could have done this or that and where I'd be today if I could read" (Smith, et. al., 1993, 12).

David's goals have been more diffuse, emerging almost imperceptibly over time. Yet, even at the beginning of his journey at the Center, he had recognized the importance of literacy for living in such a complex city as Hartford compared to his native Guyana:

> I think the future got to come with school. Don't want to start thinking about the future as yet, you know. I get a good feeling because it's one step I make already. I wait for the last moment for the first time to come to learn to read (Smith, et. al., 1993, 23).

As a construction worker, forty-three year old Pat wanted to learn to read in order to have reading skills which would prepare him for non manual labor work in later years. "I am tired of using my arms for work. I want to use my head. My body don't want to go anymore. My bones need oil" (Lestz, Demetrion, and Smith, Vol. 1, 1994, 91). Earlier, we have seen the importance of literacy in enhancing Pat's self esteem, which his oral history clearly discloses.

Carlos equates becoming increasingly literate akin to his "born again" conversion experience to Christianity:

> You know what it is...I ruined my life...I went to school, but everything is forgotten. So you forgot how to read, you forget. You forget how to write. So you've got to come back and study on it so everything will come back to you. And that's what it's been. I've got to come back and start all over again. Because I am a new child. I was born again in Christ, so everything is new. For me classwork is new for me, and it's a goal, because I have to do something with my life and not waste it like I wasted all those years (Oral history draft).

The born again motif, linking literacy and religion to the "new man," penetrates to the core of this former gang leader's being. Self esteem therefore represents a primary goal. He concludes his oral history with a discussion on how his parents now view him:

> My father and mother, right now, they shocked. They're still going, "wow, that's Carlos." They proud. Now they're proud. Cause if you'd see me going out in all those years, and you would see this terrible kid. But now you see this man who is going to school. Trying to make it. Going to church. What I didn't do when I was young, I'm doing it now. So, they proud (oral history draft).

Emerging, Implicit Goals and Aspirations

The explicit reasons people give for participating in the Center's program are significant. The discussion on outcomes and explicit goals provides testimony that for the persistent, many concrete objectives have been or are in the process of being realized. An undue focus on specific "goals," however, tends to shift the learning process toward a behaviorist mode whereby students and tutors identify specific objectives and work systematically toward their attainment. Such a model works best *when* a particular and achievable goal is at hand such as studying for a driver's license or citizenship. Thus, for a six week period, Carlos worked with his tutor, Jane, four hours per week studying the driver's manual which he did obtain.

Many other goals, however, even those concrete, often occur through indirection, particularly if the literacy level required is considerably higher than what the student already possesses. In order to maintain commitment for the long term, more intrinsic sources of motivation need to be tapped.

Derrick

Derrick, for example, had specific goals in mind when he entered the program, but new vistas opened up to him as he engaged the literacy process. Initially he thought he would improve his reading and writing skills which he did accomplish. Novel, however, was the experience of learning itself, particularly in the area of intense autobiographical reflection. Derrick had always possessed an expressive oral language aptitude, but through literacy, he was also able to develop his poetic voice in writing as his earlier essay on Jesse Jackson attests. Consider also the following extract from "The Lone Ranger:"

> I feel like I am the Lone Ranger. Sitting alone without a care and without a home. No one to see, no one to talk to, not using my time. I feel like I am losing my mind. Days and nights have gone by so fast, I do not need my mind to help me to remember how lonely I am. It pains me to think of the loneliness I feel inside. But the pain to my heart has reach up to my brain (Smith, 1991, 93).

Derrick's heart felt and provocative essays are interspersed throughout *Welcome To Our World* and a special section is devoted to a collection of his work (90-98).

Through his participation at the Center, Derrick has not only developed his intellectual aptitude, but has become an integral member of the Literacy Volunteers of Greater Hartford community by serving as a student support leader and serving on the affiliate's board of directors. He is also a charter member of the agency's North End Committee, charged with responsibility of developing a sense of the agency's presence and relevance with Hartford's African-American community.

Derrick exemplifies the characteristics of the complete adult learner. Although not what he originally had in mind, the opportunities inherent within the Center's intellectual climate combined with his own intrinsic learning drives have enabled Derrick to fulfill some of his more deeply rooted, latent aspirations for knowledge, community and mission while pursuing literacy education (Matthews, 1993). In part, he wanted to develop his skills in order to be a more effective churchman. His literacy proficiency has helped him in that area. Yet, through the process of learning and participating in the life of the Center, Derrick has opened new perceptual vistas that have been at least as important to him as his stated goals. Such consciousness could have only emerged by engaging the literacy learning process itself and experiencing its intrinsic satisfactions in action.

Eileen

Unlike Derrick, who possessed a clear sense of what he wanted to achieve, even as aspirations emerged through his engagement at the Reading Center, Eileen's motivation has been much more obtuse. Eileen is in her mid-thirties, experiences mild mental retardation, and lives at home with her family. She was brought to the Center by her concerned sister. She has made some progress in the mastery of decoding skills, but her comprehension and reading ability have only negligibly improved.

Eileen is secure in her family life, although frustrated at her marginalization at home that exacerbates her dependency. Few support systems are in place to aid Eileen in developing independent living skills. She and/or her parents may have thought that the Center could provide some help in the expansion of her practical, coping skills. However, a two hour a week volunteer tutorial program without other support systems cannot, in isolation, provide much help in those areas. Eileen has held brief employment as a dishwasher in various restaurants, but has invariably lost those positions due to her inability to cope with the workload and, to some extent, the unwillingness of the management to organize the workplace to the constraints of

Eileen's support needs. She is, however, currently employed part time in a nursery, stocking shelves, a position she attained through the assistance of a neighbor.

Eileen's two tutors have provided much insight on her hard to measure progress. Both tutors concluded that decontextual phonic exercises and sight word memorization had little appeal. However, her second tutor noted that phonics embedded within a workbook had more effect than simply breaking down words on a note pad. Eileen also does better with sight words that are contextualized through *cloze* exercise in which the student needs to choose the correct word to make sense of the sentence. Her first tutor discovered that rhyming exercises proved somewhat effective, while the second tutor identified the visual as a primary context through which Eileen learns best. Eileen has no silent reading ability and learns best through assisted reading approaches. According to her second tutor, "Some days she's cold as ice, other days she's rolling."

Her first tutor was a college librarian and had a strong avocation for children's literature which she and Eileen read constantly. Her second tutor continued in this vein, but broadened Eileen's curriculum to include human interest stories from the *Reader's Digest Skill Building* series. She also drew upon easy to read plays, job applications, vocabulary related to the kitchen, and games.

For Eileen, context is particularly important, both in term of facilitating the instructional process and in the broader social and emotional support systems that undergird her literacy efforts. The Center has been a place, as her second tutor put it, where "you can put your feet up and read together." For Eileen reading is predominantly a social and emotional experience where instruction is mediated through story and where place is critically important. Her first tutor expressed some concern about the noise level at the Center, but her second tutor penetrated to the core of Eileen's motivation in her observation that her student enjoys holding sessions in the copy room because of the hubbub of activity that enables her opportunities to meet and talk with people.

Despite their vast differences, Derrick and Eileen share one experience in common: the inherent satisfaction of engaging the literacy process as a source of intrinsic motivation whereby goals and aspirations emerge over time. For both, literacy learning is fused with a range of social and emotional motivations. Derrick is clearly more autonomous than Eileen, yet both have shared deeply in the life of the Center which has met some of each of their varied needs and aspirations in some rather unique ways.

It is clear that Eileen has many needs including, perhaps a somewhat buried drive for autonomy. The Reading Center has provided little direct support in enabling her to develop practical skills that would enhance her autonomy. Yet it has proven more successful in helping her to satisfy other aims such as a need for growth and affiliation. She has improved her reading ability and at least in part has met her intense need for support and friendship for which she has few other outlets. At the Center Eileen belongs to the community of adult literacy learners and is experiencing solidarity with her peers. I questioned her second tutor on the value of Eileen's participation in the program since her marginal literacy enhancement exerts seemingly, such a negligible effect in any practical way on her life, although that cannot be determined for certain. She concluded that "Everyone has a right to learn," which I amplified in the interview with the rejoinder, "and that is enough justification in itself."

Peter

Peter is retired and about sixty years old. He had lived in the Italian-American South End of Hartford through much of his twenties and has resided in suburban Newington ever since. As in the case of Eileen, Peter's goals do not appear readily discernible and seem to have little direct linkage with enhancing "functional" like skills as defined by the advocates of competency-based education. Peter had been enrolled in the LVGH program with negligible results prior to coming to the Reading Center in 1990. After a steady three year commitment, Peter has finally begun to make sustained progress from his near total, complete non-reader status, although he remains far from fluent as an independent reader. It will be difficult for him reach such a stage, although it is possible. Peter, moreover, has articulated no discernible goals that he would like to accomplish through literacy.

Whatever the sources of his motivation, they are enduring. He worked intensely with a small group of three students for six months until he was placed with an individual tutor. Recently another opportunity for group tutoring appeared and now he is working with the group as well as with an individual tutor. Peter virtually never cancels a tutoring session. However unarticulated, powerful motives underlie his efforts.

Peter's situation raises critical issues for the Reading Center's value system. In an era of scarce resources, both human and financial, one might question the extent to which tutoring services should be provided to adult learners like Peter. He does not need literacy development for work since he is retired. He is elderly and it is unlikely that his literacy level will be greatly enhanced over a sustained several year period, although in the final analysis, that remains unknown. Also, since Peter has no outward, stated goals other than wanting to learn how to read, an argument could be made that scarce resources should be allocated elsewhere that might have more tangible benefit.

Clearly, Peter possesses goals, however inarticulate they may seem. Along with Eileen and Derrick, the quest for affiliation plays an important role in Peter's motivation. Peter lives an isolated life and has little social connection with others.

He has limited family contact and no connection with other "mediating structures" to help him expand his social and emotional boundaries, which in turn, could enhance his sense of personal and social identity. Therefore by joining the "the literacy club" at the Center, Peter has found one social outlet for an otherwise isolated existence to which he has adapted with reasonable skill. He gets by.

With Eileen, affiliation represents a primary source of motivation. For Peter, it is an important second. The quest for mastery, nourished by the progress he has made and the acknowledgment of his tutors, represents a more enduring aim. However limited his progress may appear statistically, Peter has discovered something quite profound: a creative taproot into his own intellectual development. The core experience of growth, itself, reinforced through continual practice, spurs Peter on. Engaging the literacy process has enhanced Peter's life by opening up new vistas of learning and self-development. More may be desirable, but the inherent satisfaction that he derives from his efforts is at the least, sufficiently valid, especially in a program that recognizes the innate worth of the individual.

Anthony

Anthony, a young African-American in his early twenties, is a graduate of one of Hartford's high schools. He entered the Center's program initially in 1990 while taking remedial reading courses at the Greater Hartford Community College. Those courses and the thick textbooks he brought to the Center proved well beyond his ability. After about three months, Anthony left the Center. Approximately a year later, he returned, this time without the baggage of the college courses. We found space for Anthony in our advanced small group program. Several months later, an individual tutor became available, enabling Anthony to put in about ten hours of study per week.

Anthony's interview provides clues to the sources of his motivation, which, although diffuse, are enduring if his over 600 hours of tutoring are any indication of a sustained commitment. Improving his reading skills in itself, represents an innate need for Anthony. That may appear insufficiently concrete. Yet, given his embedded situation in a somewhat hostile, urban environment which requires literacy as one tool among many for survival, he may take such a context as self-evident, requiring no further explanation.

Furthermore communication ability, both oral and written, represents a significant goal for Anthony. Since entering the program, he senses that he can "talk to people better" and "explain himself better" due to his vocabulary expansion and enhanced self esteem. Moreover, he links a prospective career in carpentry with a need to "effectively interact with his customers." He also aspires to "become a great artist like no one else before." Whether though art, speech or literacy, Anthony seeks to enhance his communication skills.

Through literacy, it seems that Anthony seeks to transcend a compelling sense of isolation that has gripped him for years. His desire is both to communicate with others on a level that authenticates his humanity and to organize and refine his own thought processes. Consider the following passages written by Anthony, which although long, merit our full attention in their illumination of his rich and provocative life experience and "voice."

What is Art Without Human Life

> Without humans, art will not be the same: it will be loneliness. Art brings the beauty out of some people. Some people have the talent in it. Art make you realize that art is so important to human life. That make you to understand what you want out of your career in life's time. It also helps for you to understand how to communicate with people that don't understand what you are going through in life.
>
> Art is like love that can help you respect each other in life as a human being. Art is hard to understand. It is a way to communicate with jealous people who can't understand what the person have is talent.

In the next piece, untitled, Anthony speaks more directly about the dilemmas and challenges of his personal life experience:

> Sometimes I wonder where I been, who I am, and where I go. In life, be to where I am today. Do I fit in this world to make it as a human being? To make my beliefs as respectful, to describe me as a human being in life? To make me have beautiful feelings to get respect from people who like me who I am?
>
> Some people don't understand what I am going through in life. Sometimes I have trouble getting my word across to communicate with people in life. In life, it is hard to survive, to believe that you can go on.
>
> My beliefs are of value to me. They wouldn't accept me as a person because they are jealous of my beliefs that I cherish. Some people wouldn't respect your beliefs that you have in life. They would put you down for every little thing. They can't accept the jealous hate they have for a human being.
>
> They have two faults. Everything they do and everything they say. Because these people got so much hate in them, they don't understand what is going on with people like me.
>
> We shall come together and understand each other in life to make a better world to live in today.

At the Bob Steele Reading Center, Anthony is realizing some of his more deeply rooted aspirations for authenticity, "voice", and understanding. His voice moreover, is not simply that of an isolated individual, but another authentic expression of the young, male urban African-American experience, caught in the webs among hope, anger, and despair, while searching for community in a social universe encompassed by much alienation and danger. Through their emerging literacy fostered in supportive atmospheres like the Bob Steele Reading Center and LVGH's community based Family Literacy Program new adult readers are beginning to exercise the "power to be able to make (themselves)..heard and felt, to signify" (Schuster, 1990, 227). Anthony has begun to find his "voice," and through that, discover new potentialities about himself.

As with Anthony, the Center is undergoing continuous evolution. To the extent that plausibility structures within its learning environment expand, students may more completely realize a broader range of goals through its resources. Even within the Center's current limitations, Anthony has received considerable support in basic literacy acquisition and in the authentication of his aesthetic impulses. While at the Center, Anthony also obtained part time employment which has helped him both financially and in the enhancement of his self-esteem, although it is not clear precisely what role literacy and a supportive learning climate have played in this. Given additional resources, the Center will attempt to broaden its ability to help students achieve what Paulo Freire refers to as greater "humanization" (1970, 27-28) in becoming more complete individuals as autonomous selves and as participants in the networks of communities to which they need and choose to belong.

(7)

Humanistic Psychology and Adult Literacy Motivation

This study explores aspects of adult literacy motivation predominantly through qualitative documentation of learner experience and direct observation within a single program. It focuses on those learners who, for the most part, have participated in the program for a year or more and who have achieved some notable level of self-defined success through literacy. Test scores and life achievement skills, along with the concrete examples of so much of the self-reported material, provide empirical weight to the more intangible aspects of both success and motivation teased out in this study.

The findings, largely descriptive, are provisional. They presume to tell only a partial story of adult literacy motivation. What the study fails to examine is also noteworthy. It does not, for example, attempt to assess the motivational dynamic of the many people who have left the Bob Steele Reading Center before much significant learning could have taken place. To use the terminology of Allan Quigley (1990), the Center has many "resisters," for whom its learning climate has had limited appeal. A more complete story of the Center would need to explore resistance along with the "success stories" stressed in this study. Nonetheless, considering how many students have achieved notable learning outcomes and the relative paucity of studies that delineate this, it seemed appropriate to explore some of the motivational dynamics which have made this possible.

The View of Mihaly Csikzentmihalyi

This study has alluded to Csikzentmihalyi's concept of "flow experience," which he views as an underlying source of motivation for literacy (1990) . He maintains that "the chief impediments to literacy are not cognitive in nature. It is not that students cannot learn; it is that they do not wish to" (1990, 115). This study argues similarly that the vast majority of nonreading adults have nothing wrong with their "mental equipment," while not ruling out of court something akin to learning disabilities among a small minority of adults exhibiting a range of reading "problems." Constance Weaver grants a similar point, although she is compelled to add that *"I cannot help suspecting that many of these so-called 'dyslexics' might be considered adequate to good readers if meaning and not word identification were the goal"* (original emphasis) (1988, 397).

Csikzentmihalyi argues that *intrinsic* sources of motivation are the most compelling, which often evolve out of more extrinsic sources of reward (1990, 124-125). The findings in this essay are in agreement with that view. Learners who have achieved the most success have been motivated by certain inner directed goals, whether or not they have been able to clearly articulate them. Many learners at the Center, moreover, have experienced an *expansion* of their goals, moving increasingly toward intrinsic satisfaction (which includes extrinsic rewards and the acknowledgment of others) once the potential for literacy begins to be realized. A noted social psychologist identifies "efficacy" as a potent source of motivation (Bandura, 1977) which is congruent with the thesis of Csikzentmihalyi that at its peak, literacy represents a form of "flow experience" which "felt like being carried away by a current, like being in a flow" (1990, 127):

> This intense involvement is only possible when a person feels that the opportunities for action in the given activity are more or less in balance with the person's ability to respond to the opportunities (1990, 127-128).

For low level reading adults, the sense of competency or mastery that can emerge with literacy is often exhilarating.

Although Csikzentmihalyi is vaguer when it comes to describing specifically how such an ineffable phenomenon as a "flow experience" may arise, he points to the importance of goals. On this, however, he is anything but behavioristic, maintaining that "the goal is not sought for itself; it is sought only because it makes the activity possible" (1990, 129). It provides a way of transcending current experience and creating something new. As the cultural critic Giles Gunn puts it:

> It is not that we keep experiencing things beyond the ken of our experience; it is only that the ken of our experience keeps enlarging as we discover new ways to construe its components (1987, 130).

According to Csiksikzentmihalyi's humanistic perspective, a goal represents a sign-post for enhanced life itself, a view that is shared in this essay, at least among certain adult literacy learners. The extent to which the flow experience serves as a normative source of ultimate motivation requires much more evidence. This essay far from resolves the issue even though its typology tends to support a hierarchy of motivational levels, with implicit aspirations at the higher ends. Csikzenmihalyi concludes that:

> A matching set of challenges and skills, and immediate feedback, resulting in a deep concentration that prevents worry and intrusion of unwanted thoughts into consciousness, and in a transcendence of the self, are the universal characteristics associated with enjoyable activities (1990, 131).

There is much in this study congruent with Csikentmihaly's views. Yet, his essay raises at least two concerns that need to be addressed for a more complete understanding of adult literacy motivation. First, notwithstanding Csikzentmihalyi's interpretation of illiteracy as a "social phenomena," (1990, 119), and his recognition that illiteracy serves certain functional purposes (in a Parsonian sense) for the economy of the United States (123), he maintains that neither "teachers nor the educational system in general can change the way in which rewards are distributed in this society" (124). For this reason, the only tool the teacher possesses is the ability to tap into intrinsic sources of motivation.

I do not object to this observation, which characterizes the political culture of the Bob Steele Reading Center in significant ways. The Center is grounded in a

Deweyian sense of evolution that seeks as its primary objective the expansion of its learning climate, which may in turn have a residual effect of raising critical issues and establishing an organizational density that could play a part in fostering a broader social movement (Demetrion, 1993). Yet, the focus of our activity remains on the former objective which has played a significant role in enhancing the literacy development of many learners.

Still, without some fundamental restructuring of both the socio-economic system and culture of the United States, it is exceedingly unlikely that adult non-readers in statistically significant numbers will find themselves in a position where "the intrusion of unwanted thoughts into consciousness (will be eliminated) and a transcendence of the self" (131) attained. This study of motivation, therefore, focuses on only those relatively few individuals who have been able to make a sustained commitment toward enhanced literacy and even for those, the long term impact of literacy remains problematic and fluid.

The Center takes "reality" as it is and attempts to reconstruct it directly by influencing individual lives and establishing an innovative learning climate. Such changes are at best, piece-meal and reformist, although for certain individuals are "transformative," in the personal sense. They are also transformative for the program, itself in the sense that the learning climate has been reconstructed through several incarnations, particularly through its small group program and writing and oral history projects. The Center has also had some political impact in fostering the organizational development of Literacy Volunteers of Greater Hartford, which in turn, is becoming a formidable player among the non-profit sector in Hartford. This all represents important work. Yet it remains critical to keep in mind that in terms of impacting illiteracy at the socio-structural level, it remains virtually nil.

Csikszentmihaly's theory of motivation, therefore, may be quite irrelevant to the millions of non-readers who for a variety of reasons cannot or refuse (resist) to participate in the limited underfunded, understaffed and overcrowded literacy and Adult Basic Education programs that do exist.

However, Csikszentmihaly's theory of motivation may have some applicability for the minority of adult non-readers whose self-esteem and socio-economic status are sufficiently stable to concentrate intensively on literacy development for a one to three year period required to achieve significant and sustained learning. Even for that population, though, most of the learners identified in this study, his theory of flow experience lacks much of an analysis on how the various forces of motivation interact, enabling aspiring literacy learners to achieve a sustained commitment, often against difficult personal, social and cultural barriers.

Wlodowski's' Time Continuum Theory of Motivation

Raymond J. Wlodowski (1986) provides a more systematic interpretation of motivation which, nonetheless, draws from a similar humanistic framework as that of Csikszentmihalyi. While recognizing that "As a concept, motivation is a bit of a beast," (1986, 44), Wlodowski identifies "six major factors that enhance the motivation of adult learners: attitude, need, stimulation, affect, competence and reinforcement" (45). It is the structuring of these "factors" within specific time sequences that makes his theory of motivation particularly potent.

Time sequences are related to learning cycles which may be either of short duration, completed in a single session, or longer term that could take a year or longer to complete. In either case, the sequences of the factors of motivation remains the same. At the beginning stages of a learning cycle, Wlodowski maintains that initial attitudes and needs of learners are the most salient aspects of motivation. Providing stimulation and the influence of affect or emotion are most critical during or throughout a learning cycle, while achieving a sense of competence and attaining a sense of reinforcement represent the critical ending phases of a learning sequence.

Throughout his book, Wlodowski provides an extensive discussion of these factors, along with 68 strategies to enhance motivation throughout a learning cycle (254-257).

Since his theory is applicable for a learning cycle of any duration, it might be drawn upon by literacy tutors or ABE teachers in structuring particular lessons. For the purposes of this study, however, I draw on his framework almost metaphorically, as a heuristic or tool, in expanding the discussion of adult literacy motivation at the Bob Steele Reading Center. Certain "factors," like attitude, I will merely mention because they have been extensively elaborated upon in this text. I will examine others more thoroughly because such sources of motivation have not been made as explicit in this text.

Attitude

This study has drawn out the importance of attitude formation for self-esteem, particularly in the initial stages of participation in the Center's program. This factor remains important throughout the learning cycle as well. Yet, as we have seen, in the cases of Willie, Pat and Sandra, attitudes, what Wlodowski defines as "a combination of concepts, information, and emotions that result in a predisposition to respond favorably or unfavorably toward particular people, groups, ideas, events, or objects" (1986, 45-46), have exerted a powerful effect on the initial predispositions of these learners even to undertake the at times, arduous and courageous effort toward becoming increasingly literate. We conclude with Wlodowski that the attitudes adult literacy learners form:

> (1) toward the instructor, (2) toward the subject and learning situation, (3) toward themselves as learners, and (4) toward their expectancy for success in the learning activity (1986, 73),

play a powerful role in determining initial commitment. Such themes have been drawn out extensively in this study and will not receive further comment here.

Need

The vast preponderance of literacy learners who participate in the Center's program for any appreciable time, have been provoked by a certain set of needs. "According to Wlodowski, "A *need* is a condition experienced by the individual as an external force that leads the person to move in the direction of a goal" (1986, 47). Often, at the early stages of program involvement, needs appear diffuse, wherein many learners express a self-evident desire to attain general reading competency. When pressed during intake to identify specific goals, some learners mention a need to "fill out applications," to help their children with homework or a general desire to get along better in society. Sometimes learners identify more specific goals, such as obtaining a job or a driver's license, although often, goal identification at intake remains hazy.

A dilemma for literacy educators is that often, even specific needs cannot be quickly realized, particularly by lower level readers. Literacy, moreover, represents only one variable toward life improvement. An important task for the literacy educator, therefore, is to assist learners in clarifying needs along with interests and aspirations, setting up realistic time tables in fulfilling them. An additional task is to help students deepen their internalization of needs, transforming them into wants and desires (1986, 48) by illuminating the connection between particular goals and specific levels of literacy attainment. Even more, considering the length of time required by most learners to attain fluency, creating or building upon a desire that views literacy, itself, as an attainable and worthy end is also critical (Csikentmihalyi, 1990).

Needs identification remains critical throughout the learning process. As this essay has demonstrated at least in a few cases, needs and goals *expand* as increased literacy is attained, which in turn, reinforces as sense of "efficacy" (Bandura, 1977) and motivation. Yet, it is the centrality of needs even at an early, often unarticulated stage, which along with attitude formation, plays a significant role in helping learners sustain a commitment to long term literacy development. On the surface, this study provides some evidence that attitude formation is more fundamental than need identification in the early stages of literacy work. Learners are often better able to *express* their attitudes than *articulate* their needs and that may be the real difference. Yet, without some profound sense of felt need at least at the visceral level, it seems unlikely that low reading adults would ever make the journey to places like the Reading Center.

Affect

Wlodowski identifies affect and stimulation as the primary sources of motivation *during*, or throughout a particular learning sequence which I am using here, almost metaphorically, to refer to the bulk of time that learners commit to the process of becoming literate; a period which may extend from one to three or more years. This essay has dealt extensively with the centrality of affect or emotion on adult literacy motivation. I will not belabor it here, therefore, except to underscore Wlodowski's point on its general importance and its integrative contribution to a socio-linguistic interpretation of literacy. It is not affect, alone, but the "constant dynamic of thinking, feeling and behaving (which)...puts vitality and humanity into the learning situation" (Wlodowski, 1986, 53). Psychologist Jerome Bruner argues similarly:

> ...the components of behavior I am speaking of are not emotions, cognitions, and actions, each in isolation, but aspects of a larger whole that achieves its integration only within a cultural system. Emotion is not usefully isolated from the knowledge of the situation that arouses it. Cognition is not a form of pure knowing to which emotion is added....And action is a final common path based on what one knows and feels (1986, 117-118).

Throughout this study, we have seen the importance of emotion and the student-tutor bond as one of the most compelling building blocks in long term, effective, literacy development. Yet, in my travels with Literacy Volunteers, I have come across the phrase, "warm fuzzies," often used in a disparaging way, particularly by certain individuals who rely predominately on "hard" data, typically statistical analysis of standardized test scores. As this study has made abundantly clear, by now, there is more at work here than "warm fuzzies;" anecdotal accounts to be used perhaps for public relations campaigns.

The student-tutor relationship represents a bedrock, but it is the integration of thought and emotion linked to a plan of action or set of goals that helps to prevent an overidentification with the learners emotional needs on the one hand or a cold like efficiency on the other hand (Dirx, Fonfora, Flaska, 1993). At its best, the student and tutor develop an emotional/cognitive bond which links self-esteem to the particular task at hand; of achieving literacy for a certain set of purposes.

An upward spiral is established where emotion, cognition and action continually reinforce each other. This does not always happen at the Reading Center, but it represents a pedagogical ideal toward which we strive. Neither, unfortunately, does such an objective always meet the most critical needs of learners who may have more pressing life issues with which to contend. Yet, given the current marginality of adult literacy education within the United States, notwithstanding a rhetorical "war" against illiteracy, including a Presidential mandate to "eradicate" the problem by 2000, such a focus represents our coming to terms with existing resources. Linking emotional support directly to literacy learning for self-defined purposes represents our core mission even as we have attempted in some extremely limited ways to assist learners in dealing with a wider range of, often compelling social and emotional issues (Arroyo, 1993).

Stimulation

Wlodowski defines stimulation as "any change in our perception or experience with our environment that makes us active" (1986, 51). He alludes to evidence from neurophysiology which "suggests that an actual need for stimulation exists and argues that "Small or moderate changes in arousal are reinforcing to us and cause us to direct our attention toward those various forms of stimulation" (51). Along with affect, Wlodowski views stimulation as an often neglected factor required to spark motivation during, or throughout a learning sequence.

This factor becomes particularly important in adult literacy where the "during" phase of learning may take three years, given, also, the host of extrinsic and intrinsic factors that often act to subvert a long term commitment to literacy development. Drawing upon Wlodowski's categories loosely as a heuristic, I will focus here on three sources of stimulation which permeate the Reading Center's learning climate. These are, the environment of the Bob Steele Reading Center, itself, the collaborative dynamic of both its group tutoring program and special projects, and an approach to instruction that draws extensively upon "Vygotsky's zone of proximal development." I am taking certain liberties with Wlodowski's category in order to explore the broader socio-linguistic culture of the Reading Center which ultimately impacts on daily instruction.

The Physical Environment

The Bob Steele Reading Center is situated in Hartford's West Central End, Parkville neighborhood, comprised ethnically, largely of of Portuguese, East Asian and Hispanic populations. It is located in an attractive, restored factory that had once housed the Underwood Typewriting Company. The Center is easily accessible from the highway, which makes it a convenient site for our largely suburban tutors who feel safe in this relatively secured building. The Center is also close to major bus lines, which many of our students depend upon. The Center serves not only as an important site for adult literacy instruction in Hartford, but as a unique intercultural meeting ground where people with diverse backgrounds participate in common goals and projects. Given the social, racial, geographical, economic and educational segmentation so pervasive in the United States, such an opportunity for this type of cultural interchange is potentially an important stimulation in itself (Lestz, Demetrion, and Smith, Vol. 1, 1994, 4). Through its group tutoring program, its writing and oral history projects and college internship program, the Center has capitalized on such energies.

Posters on the wall, the eclectic furniture, the tall ceilings and the combination of open and closed spaces provide the physical backdrop to an atmosphere of community and informality that sustains students and tutors alike. The accessibility of a full time staff person, a committed group of tutors, many of whom have volunteered at the Center for several years and a well stocked library consisting of the best available material from the various adult education presses as well as our own created texts, provide considerable personal support that is reinforced by the physical environment. To borrow a line from the television program, **Cheers**, the Bob Steele Reading Center is very much "a place where everybody knows your name."

Collaboration

Literacy instruction at the Reading Center is fueled through an intensive collaborative process that serves as another critical source of stimulation. In the traditional LVA model, tutors volunteer to work with students, one-on-one, typically two hours per week. In this way, many people have learned to read who otherwise would not have had an opportunity. While large-sized ABE classes provide assistance to many individuals, LVA's traditional model, notwithstanding certain drawbacks, establishes a critical personal encounter between learner and tutor which is particularly important for lower level reading students. This study has provided a certain level of documentation in support of such a thesis.

Still, the one-on-one model remains limited in at least two respects: it restricts the number of instructional hours a learner can engage in within a given period of time and it isolates learners from each other. In response to these problems, LVA, in recent years, has embraced the collaborative model as reflected in such training manuals as *Reading with Children* (Laminack, 1989) and *Small Group Tutoring* (Cheatham and Lawson, 1990). This recent emphasis is not a replacement of the individual program but as an alternative and/or complement.

In several key areas, the small group tutoring program at the Reading Center differs from the model suggested by LVA. Instruction generally flows more from materials selected, usually by the tutor, than identified goals (Cheatham and Lawson, 1990, 19). The groups are more tutor led than participatory in the profoundly egalitarian way promoted by LVA (4). The groups, moreover, are permanent features of the Reading Center, which provides the program with its essential organizing structure. LVA, by contrast, views as desirable, a more finite time frame for the life of the instructional small groups (10-13).

The small group tutoring program at the Center emerged much more from the dynamics of our local situation than from any attempt to follow LVA's model (Demetrion, 1991). A long term goal remains, however, to critically evaluate our experience in light of LVA's philosophy and in turn, to examine the national model through the lenses of our experience. That, though, remains beyond the bounds of this study to explore in any systematic way.

One feature that is common both to the Center's small group tutoring program and the LVA model is the centrality of intense collaboration between students and tutors and among students as well. Discussion is lively and often thought provoking.

Learners feel free to fully express their views, ask questions and challenge tutors and each other (Demetrion, 1993, 43-47). The groups, moreover, are set up to enable learners to cycle through the Center three evenings per week with different sets of often, team tutors, each evening. Each tutor or team of tutors provides something unique in terms of teaching style and selection of materials. Many of the group participants as well, work with individual tutors. Such variability, along with the increased tutoring hours over the traditional LVA norm, serves as a continuous source of stimulation built within the organizational structure of the program.

Collaboration is also fostered through the various projects that the Center has developed, particularly in student writing and in the recent creation of oral history narratives of literacy learners throughout LVA (Smith, 1991, Smith, et. al., 1993; Lestz, Demetrion, and Smith, 1994). Through these texts, community building has no longer been exclusively dependent upon face-to-face interaction, even though such texts have enhanced the dynamics of group tutoring as well. Through the spoken *and* written word, learners throughout LVGH have been able to develop a sense of shared consciousness and empathy for and among each other. The texts have also contributed toward a sense of remembered past; they have helped to establish in Hartford, a sense of collective identity among adult literacy learners, which has helped to transform an amalgamation of isolated individuals into a group of bonded people, linked together through shared experiences and common purposes.

Such an emerging identity is played out in creative tension with the ethos of individualism which remains pervasive as a dominant value among virtually all groups of people within the United States. As this entire study has illustrated, adult literacy learners seek both personal empowerment and a deepened sense of shared identity with others. These texts, along with the extensive small group program at both the Reading Center and LVGH's Family Literacy Program, make a significant contribution to both of these objectives. The stimulation through collaboration is reinforced at the Center by honoring this tension.

Scaffolding

A "scaffolding" approach to literacy development which represents the dominant pedagogical strategy of the Reading Center, serves as a potent instructional stimulus. The scaffolding, or bridging concept is premised on the Russian psychologist V.I. Vygotsky's "zone of proximal development," defined as "The distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined by problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Gaffrey and Anderson, 1991, 184).

This study has drawn out many examples of scaffolding, particularly in reference to "assisted reading" approaches. More broadly, scaffolding is emblematic not only of the dominant student/tutor relationship at the Reading Center, but the characteristic strategy of all of its programs and projects, including group tutoring, writing, the development of oral history narratives and portfolio construction.

It is essential to come to terms with the ambiguity of scaffolding, since it entails, in varying degrees, an element of shaping behavior in certain proscribed directions. It has, therefore, the potential of exacerbating what Hal Beder refers to as a stigmatic view of literacy (1991). As the eminent educational psychologist Jerome Bruner reminds us, moreover, "there is a hidden agenda in Vygotsky's account, and it needs to be made explicit" (1986, 74). Specifically, Vygotsky's "zone" was part of a broader political/cultural project to "modernize" Russian peasants roughly along the lines among the more progressive (anti-Stalinist) tenets of the Russian Revolution. Thus, those "more capable peers" who directed literacy campaigns where Vygotsky developed his theory, had very much a political agenda in mind in a desire to shape the consciousness of Russian peasants. A conservative reading of Vygotsky's zone can easily slide into a rationalization for elitism and ethnocentrism defined by the value system of the more "knowledgeable" adult.

As a corrective to this tendency, advocates of participatory literacy education maintain that learners have the right to exercise "active control, responsibility, and reward vis-a-vis some or all of program activities" (Fingeret and Jurmo, 1989, 18) in the areas of instruction and program management. The concern, expressed by Fingeret, is that learners draw upon their *own* social worlds in literacy education, however "inadequate" those worlds appear to middle class observers (9). As I have argued elsewhere, respect for learner social and psychic experience should be built into any literacy program, but that learners *also* seek to develop literacy skills in part, in order to move beyond their current social status and cultural understanding (Demetrion, 1993, 33).

There are some delicate spaces that need to be worked out in concrete ways within specific programs among these two positions. It is all-too-easy to tip the scales toward elitism on the one hand and a romanticized notion of participatory democracy on the other hand, neither of which serve the learner well. What seems critical in the stimulation of motivation is identifying and grounding instruction at the student's learning cutting edge --the pedagogical strategy of Vygotsky's zone; that is simultaneously linked to the most fundamental needs, interests, and aspirations of learners within a broad range of personal, practical and sociocultural realms that emerge from intense dialogue among learners and between learners and tutors/teachers. Such an ideal is not always realized at the Reading Center, but it represents its core pedagogical value system, exemplified particularly in its small group tutoring program, *Welcome To Our World* (Smith, 1991) and most recently in our oral history publication, *Life Stories By And For Students And Their Tutors* (Smith, et. al., 1993).

A major reason why Vygotsky's zone represents a more dominant pedagogical strategy than participatory literacy education, particularly in its more radical sense, is because the Reading Center, notwithstanding its innovative instructional program and collaborative social climate, is still a place that most students and tutors identify as school. As such, many traditional teacher/student roles remain operative, particularly the role of the instructor in initiating and selecting lessons (although not always), and a common sense view among most students and tutors, that whatever else literacy development may entail, skill building, even among more advanced learners, should play a central role in the instructional process.

The Reading Center has embraced many of the more progressive views of and approaches toward literacy education developed by LVA in more recent years (Cheatham and Lawson, 1990; Cheatham, Colvin and Laminack, 1993), although with its own particular slant. With the oral history texts and the emphasis on qualitative research, the Center is taking the lead within the LVA system, although clearly operative within its progressive, student-centered philosophy.

Yet, the work at the Bob Steele Reading Center emerges within a learning environment very much shaped by Vygotsky's zone in a place identified as school. It is the creative tension between such a traditional structural framework and a commitment to a humanistic, collaborative pedagogy that has served as the underlying stimulus for learners, tutors and project volunteers at the Center. Sometimes this learning atmosphere has been aided by intensive participatory approaches. At other times, direct instruction has proven more of an effective vehicle. In either case, respect for the learner, the importance of collaboration and a powerful commitment to learning as an intrinsic value in itself, have shaped the Reading Center program. This climate has served as a powerful stimulus which infuses the daily operation.

Ending Stages of Motivation

This study has stressed more of what Wlodowski refers to as the first two stages of motivation: beginning and during. It has proven more difficult to identify in as complete a way the ending phases of "competence" and "reinforcement." To be sure, they have appeared far from absent in this analysis, particularly in the four extensive case studies and the sections on outcomes and goals. There is no need to reiterate their manifestations here. It is readily admitted that the ending phases, for a variety of reasons, have not served as pervasive sources of motivation as the earlier stages.

The length of time required to achieve a reasonable degree of independent, fluent literacy serves as one such limiting factor. Whether programs should operate on such a general goal is a debatable issue. Certain competency based and workplace literacy programs emphasize the attainment of specific skills, while participatory initiatives sometimes stress the centrality of types and levels of literacy identified by learners, themselves. Each of these orientations has validity within certain, given contexts. In our program, the vast majority of learners have identified as a major goal a common sense objective of enhancing their reading and writing ability. We have emphasized, therefore, the attainment of general literacy fluency through a broad range of issue/topic areas through a variety of approaches linked to the learning styles and interests of participating students.

Our longitudinal data is demonstrating that three-to- five years of regular participation is often required for students to make significant, sustainable progress toward literacy, particularly for lower level readers. We have expended considerable energies, therefore, in establishing a learning climate with a strong emphasis on socio-emotional support and intellectual stimulation. Through such a stable environment, many lower and intermediate level students have identified the Bob Steele Reading Center as a place where they feel both comfortable and challenged in making the journey toward enhanced literacy. Thus far in our history, we have placed much more emphasis upon building and sustaining such a learning environment rather than concentrating on the ending phases of the learning cycle. We need to move increasingly in that direction, particularly for and with the Center's more advanced students, while remaining in agreement with the importance Csikzentmihalyi places on learning as an intrinsic value in itself (1990).

A second, related factor for the emphasis on the process of becoming literate over that of completing or ending stages leading to application, is the wide gap between the attainment of even moderately fluent literacy and the actual achievement of many desired life goals. In a nineteenth-century study of illiteracy, historian Harvey J. Graff pointed out the many disparities between the promise of literacy on the one hand to the prospect of social and vocational mobility on the other hand. According to Graff:

> ...systematic patterns of inequality and stratification--by origins, class, sex, race, and age--were deep and pervasive, and relatively unaltered by the influence of literacy. The social hierarchy..., even by mid-century in the modernizing urban areas, was ordered more by the dominance of social ascription than by the acquisition of new, achieved characteristics (1979, xviii).

Through his extensive documentation of the disparities between the promise and the reality, Graff debunks what he characterizes as "the literacy myth."

According to Allan Quigley, such myths, which more often serve the policy needs of government than even the *perceived* needs of potential adult literacy learners, have been pervasive within literacy campaigns of the twentieth century, as well (1990). For example, Forrest P. Chisman, to whom Quigley refers, links literacy development with:

> the twenty million-plus adults who are seriously deficient in basic skills (to) become fully productive workers and citizens well before (a certain "rendezvous with demographic destiny") occurs. Without their best efforts over the next twenty years, there is little hope for the economic and social future of this country (1989, 3).

Presidential goals such as "eliminating illiteracy by 2000," intensifies a "crisis" mentality which reinforces the myth that literacy in itself represents a major solution to a wide range of complex personal and social problems. There is more rhetoric than insight on the depiction of illiteracy in the popular press, which is inundated with statistics, dire forecasts and stirring anecdotes of individuals overcoming illiteracy, pulling themselves up by their own bootstraps.

Such a rhetorical climate also pervades the major literacy agencies, serving as a critical component of their organizational cultures. The rhetoric links agencies with a concerned public and with the corporate benevolent community whose resources fund the "war" against illiteracy. The rhetoric, moreover, provides a sense of direction and hope against what is, in effect, an intractable social problem as endemic as the drug war, poverty and urban crime. Without some radical restructuring of the socio-economic life of the United States and of its profoundly alliterate culture, both extremely unlikely in the foreseeable future, high levels of illiteracy will remain pervasive as both symptom and partial cause of the deep chasm separating the haves and have nots within the United States. Paulo Freire argues correctly in his contention that the Third World has become internalized within the urban sectors of the United States (1985, 188).

This study of motivation at the Bob Steele Reading Center points to certain "life improvements" among those who have persisted with their literacy education. The almost elusive quality of self-esteem has emerged as a major benefit of sustained study. Also, specific, concrete objectives have been attained, such as obtaining a driver's license or a better job, developing communication skills, learning how to learn in a formal, school-based way, and entering into more advanced adult education programs. For the individuals concerned, these represents tangible, yet limited and often ambiguous outcomes. Their value usually depends on how such attainments lead to other "life improvements," which may depend on forces beyond their control.

That literacy has a certain inherent value, particularly when linked to specific needs, interests and aspirations, draws some support from this study and provides corroborating evidence for Csikszenmihalyi's thesis that the stimulation of intrinsic motivation represents a powerful incentive toward literacy development. Yet, the gap between the myth and reality that there is a direct link between literacy and upward mobility or even that it often changes personal life in profoundly transformational ways, although sometimes it does makes accurate goal setting and the ending stages of literacy education very problematical. We have not yet tackled this issue in any sustained way at the Bob Steele Reading Center.

The third limiting factor in the de-emphasis of the ending stages of motivation is my own proclivity for process over product in managing the evolution of the Bob Steele Reading Center. This process focus is linked to a pragmatic epistemology wherein "truth" emerges from the exigencies of actual experience. Such a pragmatic ethos has characterized both my pedagogical approach and the actual organizational construction of the program.

On the former, this has meant a rejection of the dominant "functionalist" paradigm of literacy as well as of the "counterhegemonic," "emancipatory" alternative, in favor of more humanistic orientations that remain grounded in the richness, complexity and ambiguity of the actual "lived experiences" of program participants. Such a pedagogy embraces both the normative tendencies of instrumentalism while authenticating as well, intense autobiographical experience, often in a collaborative format. Thus, within the Reading Center program, autobiography is less a study of the self in "splendid isolation" than a form of cultural reconstruction and analysis (Smith et. al., 1993; Lestz, Demetrion and Smith, 1994).

Particularly within the small group program, autobiography is supplemented with a profusive study of biography and a wide range of socio-cultural themes.

There is little "transformative" in the radical, structural sense emerging from the Reading Center's educational program. Yet, it does push open plausibility structures within the intellectual, social, and emotional worlds of its participants and in true pragmatic fashion, accepts the historically given as "a series of opening moves rather than a delimiting or enclosing mode" (Graff, 1987, 2). The Center's pedagogy resonates with an infinitely plastic social universe that holds both incredible constraints and untold opportunities. Thus far a drive toward perpetual becoming over being characterizes the Reading Center's "inner life." Yet, even that tendency represents various points in historical time rather than a perpetual ideology or resting point. Things could shift in novel directions.

A pragmatic dynamic also has been operative in the organizational development of the Reading Center. From my inception as its program director since 1987, I recognized as a key force, the importance of *potentiality* as a major motivational source. My sense of things was analogous to John Dewey's perception of an "open" universe, an "unfinished world." Such "openness," seemed directly connected in part, to the sense of hope and possibility stimulated among many learners and volunteers, in part, via the literacy myth. The myth is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it legitimizes certain social policies and attitudes with an intent toward social control as both Graff and Quigley have documented. On the other hand, it engenders a sense of possibility among students and tutors that literacy is achievable with persistence and good will, and through that, life in some intangible, but profound ways can become transformed. This myth has provided much of the energy that has enabled us to reconstruct the Reading Center's organizational culture and learning climate through several dramatic stages of growth over its brief, seven year history. However ambiguous and "false" such a myth may be, it has provided an impetus for action that a more cynical or even "objective" orientation might have forestalled. Whether such a stance is justifiable can only be worked out in the crucible of history.

My reading of the environment was shaped by more than merely optimism. A sense of closure, reflecting the "iron cage" vision of Dewey's European counterpart, sociologist Max Weber, threatened to overwhelm the force field of the Reading Center's environment at least on my reading of the situation. The Weberian mode of structural determinism, reflected in the post-industrial imagery of the functional literacy paradigm plays a dominant role in many literacy agencies and the broader organizational and political cultures in which they are embedded. At its starkest, it represents a closed world where behaviors and attitudes of administrators, teachers and students are shaped by the self-fulfilling, self-evident assumptions of competency-based education; namely, that adult literacy learners seek basic education for some rather narrow instrumental purposes only. Through such a dominant ethos, the purpose of literacy becomes defined as the ability "to function proficiently in society."

Such a functionalist pedagogy becomes institutionally reinforced through evaluation mechanisms based on the centrality of "hard" data, namely quantitative measurements through standardized testing (Sticht, 1990). Many radical scholars interpret such a paradigm as a form of social reproduction that reinforces the many inequalities of race, class, gender and ethnicity so characteristic, particularly of modern urban experience (Freire, 1970; Bowles and Gintis, 1976; Apple, 1982; Giroux, 1983; Shapiro, 1990). As a form of cultural critique, I share much of this view. With the adoption by LVA-CT of the Connecticut Adult Performance Program (CAPP), a competency-based adult basic education system modeled precisely after the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS), the functionalist paradigm would become even more normative throughout the LVA affiliates in Connecticut. My concern has been that through a variety of institutional interlocking mechanisms, a broad-based functionalist mentality could seep into even the Reading Center environment or at least blunt a more dynamic pedagogy from emerging by limiting resources aimed to develop its "peculiar" learning climate.

Yet, there were other, more localized energies afoot that provided scope for another direction. These were linked directly to the needs, interests and aspirations of the program's students and volunteers, along with my own intellectual passions which moved in a direction far different than that of CAPP. The force field of potentiality out of which I acted was characterized by a peculiar mix of idealism. enthusiasm, realism and kinetic energy. While post-industrial macro-forces acted as a type of constraint, a countervailing force, governed by the gap between any given current reality in the Center's history and the potential of what Freire refers to as greater "humanization" (1970), served as a galvanizing power, stimulating the variety of "transformations" that have characterized the Reading Center's organizational culture and learning climate.

This energy field was intensified, at least in my mind by the precariousness of the Reading Center project as conceived as something significantly different than the functionalist model. My felt sense was that unless a countervailing humanistic emphasis, which incorporated instrumental values was developed to its *full* potential, the functionalist paradigm would become increasingly pervasive if not actually within the Reading Center, certainly all around it, given its appeal with the popular press, government, business and within the ideology of the major literacy agencies, themselves. I was convinced, whether rightly or wrongly, that a program which tapped into the intrinsic needs, interests and desires among learners and volunteers provided considerably more viability than the abstract canon of competency-based education. In the social conservative climate of Hartford, Connecticut, in a state that defines competency-based education as normative for

ABE, in a state and local agency that lacked other viable models of literacy education, it would take considerable energy and persistence to chart out another course, one that was founded on its own unique identity.

The challenge required more than merely *articulating* another perspective. It necessitated, rather, its *construction* through a step-by-step accumulation of program density, reinforced by several dramatic breakthroughs which placed the Reading Center in a new light within its own self- identity and within the organizational cultures of LVA-CT and LVGH. It would take us too far afield to explore the "transformative" history of the Bob Steele Reading Center. A brief description is provided in my essay, "Participatory Literacy Education: A Complex Phenomenon" (1993, 39-40) and I discuss something of its inner dynamics in an earlier, unpublished piece (Demetrion, 1991).

The point, both simple and complex, is that by focusing on process and by nurturing the potential resident within our force field at any given time, we built and transformed the Reading Center program, often in serendipitous ways. To take a line from John Dewey:

> We always live at the time we live and not at some other time, and only by extracting at each present time the full meaning of each present experience are we prepared for doing the same thing in the future. This is the only preparation which in the long run amounts to anything (1938, 49)

This fundamental pragmatic assumption has served as the philosophical underpinning for the Bob Steele Reading Center throughout its brief history and has provided the impetus for its transformations. By such a reconstructive process, we have evolved through a succession of stages: from a traditional one-on-one tutoring program housed in tenuous, borrowed space, yet, with enough resident energy to move LVA-CT and LVGH to overcome the inertia of their culture wars to find permanent space both for the Center and the local affiliate (Demetrion, 1993, 37-39).

That profound organizational and cultural change in turn, created the force field enabling us to develop a dynamic small group tutoring program which established an intensely collaborative environment which sparked a major writing project culminating in *Welcome To Our World* (Smith, 1991). The Center's group tutoring program also provided the instructional model for Steve Bender's Family Literacy Program that has sites in various schools and community agencies in Hartford's predominantly African-American North End.

The collaborative environment of the Center and its evolving humanistic literacy program made it an ideal site to engage in an oral history project with Trinity College, culminating in two books; one for the literacy learner, *Life Stories By and For New Readers* (Smith et. al., 1993) and *"Reading the World:" Life Naratives By New Readers*. (Lestz, Demetrion and Smith, 1994).

These histories, combined with the Center's emerging research projects may provide the impetus for another incarnation: the transformation of the Bob Steele Reading Center into a well-funded, regionally and nationally recognized adult literacy laboratory/research center. Other projects such as portfolio development and qualitative assessment and evaluation lend support to such a direction. Whether such a vision comes to pass, it represents the "telos" out of which we have been operating for some time. It is the processes unleashed toward the realization of this vision that has played a dominant role, particularly in the Center's "psychic" history which has up to now, led us to emphasize growth and "becoming" over completion and "being." Consequently, to use Wlodowski's terms, there has been more of an emphasis on the *during* rather than the *ending* stages of the Reading Center's learning cycle, although far from completely so.

Qualitative Assessment

As of this writing, the Center is in the beginning stages of implementing a qualitative assessment project drawing on the research of Susan L. Lytle. The assessment consists of an extensive checklist/questionaire based upon Lytle's four categories of literacy development: practices, strategies and interests, beliefs and goals (1991). The extent to which such a packet becomes institutionalized within the Center remains to be seen. There are three projected stages. The first requires an annual completion or adaptation of the assessment packet. The second stage focuses on evaluation where students and tutors meet with a trained volunteer or myself to explore the ramifications of the findings. A final stage has not yet been thought out, but requires some way of incorporating the data into an administrative tool that can tell another story about adult literacy than that provided by test scores.

The assessment packet incorporates Marilyn Gillepsie's *Goals List* (1988, 45-47). The *Goals List* has been used in an informal way at the Center and thus far has served as the single-most effective instrument that we have used to enable students and tutors to identify, refine and formalize learning objectives and goals. Thus, through the assessment packet and an emerging portfolio project we expect to develop more satisfying relationships between the processes of becoming literate with concrete outcomes and goals. Yet, given the gap perpetuated by and internalized through the "literacy myth" between the promise of literacy and what it actually delivers, our emphasis is likely to remain focused on sharpening the learning process even as we aspire toward and celebrate concrete achievements.

(8)

Conclusion

The framework for such a process orientation stems in part from the Center's integrated educational vision which in its ideal construct links learners' needs, interests and aspirations within the realm of the personal, practical and socio-cultural, often through autobiographical, collaborative and sometimes local community contexts. A major purpose often emerging from such contexts is a quest for a deepened understanding of experience. Such a quest resonates with Dewey's thesis "that the educational process has no end beyond itself (since)...the educational process is one of continual reorganizing, reconstructing, transforming" (1916, 50).

This study agrees with both the advocates of competency-based and participatory learning that education needs to be purposeful. It differs, though, from the competency perspective of skills necessary to "function proficiently in society," by stressing development through continuous evolution. It also differs from some of the more utopian aspects of participatory education which places educators in the role of mere facilitators where "there is no 'teacher' to give easy answers. (Instead) each participant (of a group) becomes a teacher for the others and each participant learns from the other members of the group" (Cheatham and Lawson, 1990, 5). The problem here is that the way in which learning takes place takes precedence over what is learned. Thus, LVA's participatory program, notwithstanding its many positive contributions in authenticating learner experience, provides no powerful educational role for the tutor in assisting literacy learners to critically learn from experience. This tendency has been partially corrected in the more balanced perspective of *Tutor 7* which defines "the tutor's role as coach/facilitator" (Cheatham, Colvin, and Laminack, 1993, 20).

Criticizing "Either-Or' educational philosophies of the traditionalist/progressive camps of his day, Dewey emphasized not merely experience; "For some experiences are mis-educative" (1938, 25). Rather, "Everything depends upon the *quality* of the experience which is had" (1938, 27)

> The quality of any experience has two aspects. There is an immediate aspect of agreeableness or disagreeableness, and there is its influence upon later experiences. The first is easy and obvious to judge. The *effect* of an experience is not borne on its face. It sets a problem to the educator. It is his business to arrange for the kind of experiences which, while they do not repel the student, but rather engage his activities are, nevertheless, more than immediately enjoyable since they promote having desirable future experiences. Just as no man lives or dies to himself, so no experience lives or dies to itself. Wholly independent of desire or intent, every experience lives on to further experience. Hence the central problem of an education based upon experience is to select the kind of present experiences that live fruitfully and creatively in subsequent experiences (1938, 27-28).

Simply put, a fundamental role of the educator at *any* level, but particularly so in adult literacy, is both to explore and enhance the quality of the life experiences of learners in whatever ways possible and to provide bridges linking current experiences to new potentiality that resonate authentically with the actual and emerging life conditions and perceptions of learners. Such an orientation is ineradicably participatory even as the teacher brings her or his special insight and expertise to the learning situation.

In the post-modern, post-industrial temper of the late twentieth century, it is difficult to be as sanguine as was perhaps Dewey about any progressive evolution of selves and society in the forging of the "great community" (McDermott, 1981, 620-643). At the same time, it need be mentioned that Dewey realized how precarious was the future as his vision of progressive evolution where "free social inquiry (might become)...indissolubly wedded to the art of full and moving communication" (McDermott, 1981, 643), represented only a potentiality that might never come to pass. Throughout the pages of *Democracy and Education*, he acknowledges tendencies already present on the fragmentation and alienation of so much of early twentieth century schooling.

Yet, much of his founding thought remains viable at the end of the twentieth century, particularly in adult literacy where at least the *potentiality* for creative, experiential education remains open, notwithstanding the hegemonic influence of the functional paradigm. Of particular importance is Dewey's insistence that learning progresses from current experience, with the major educational challenge of enhancing its quality through its transformation. As this study has indicated as well as that of Fingeret and Danin (1991), whatever else that adult literacy may not accomplish, it has *at least* the potential of stimulating such growth.

For many of the learners at the Reading Center, this type of development where individuals expand their life horizons in collaboration with and in community with others, has played a significant, although often an uncertain role in the construction of personal meaning and purpose. As Derrick Matthews, the longest continuing student at the Bob Steele Reading Center puts it:

> What are my limits? Right now, I'm seeking to see what this is. If I get into something that doesn't work right I move on to the next thing. I think that's where I stand right now. I don't know my limits, right now. I'm just taking anything I can grab onto and seeing what I can do with it (Smith et. al., 1993, 109).

Dewey maintains that "A reorganization of education so that learning takes place in connection with the intelligent carrying forward of purposeful activities is a slow work" (1916, 137). Much of the pedagogical emphasis at the Reading Center has focused on such "carrying forward" *toward* enhanced being through education. Much of the effort thus far has been haphazard, notwithstanding a general alignment with Dewey's thought. A major task ahead is to engage in such "carrying forward" with more deliberateness. Such an effort will not prove easy, yet it represents, I believe, the next logical step forward in the Reading Center's history toward any trajectory of becoming a major adult literacy laboratory/research center. Of course, it is not inevitable that the Reading Center will follow this line. Post-industrial energies could push it in another direction.

As many commentators have pointed out, Dewey did not sufficiently take into account the role of power, particularly that of corporate consumer capitalism in influencing both mass behavior and the institution of schooling itself in facilitating social reproduction. A similar critique can be made against this Reading Center vision. In certain fundamental ways, Dewey's pragmatic vision of the "great community" emerging through progressive education, failed in its key acid test: it did not actually provide the pathway for reconstructing twentieth century life. Vocationalism became split from academic preparation in twentieth century schooling and a large gap between current experiences of children and youth and the curriculum remains endemic.

Yet, such leftist educational scholars like Michael Apple (1982) and Henry Giroux (1983) maintain that Weber's "iron cage" of social determinism is not the final word. While fully acknowledging the hegemonic force of corporate consumer capitalism on all major institutions, including schooling, they identify certain counterspaces that students and educators can carve out for themselves in local settings that speak of a more liberated vision of human experience. Through solidarity with like-minded others, these radicals identify the potential of a broader social vision that can exert some influence on the reigning ideology.

The historian James T. Kloppenberg argues similarly from a neo-pragmatic perspective. Unlike Apple and Giroux whose critique is grounded in a radical, critical analysis of American society which pits "emancipatory" and "oppressive" social and cultural experience in polar opposite camps, Kloppenberg works from the more "reconstructive" energies of the pragmatic temper of William James and John Dewey. Although he recognizes the *historical* failure of early twentieth century Progressive thought informed by philosophical pragmatism, he draws on its underlying perspective in keeping alive the possibility that a more vigorous democracy may yet take hold even in the post-modern, considerably more cynical *fin-de-siecle* temper of the present:

> What is accomplished today may be undone tomorrow; what is left undone today can be accomplished tomorrow. The indeterminacy of democracy offers no basis for complacency or even confidence that progress toward positive freedom and genuine equality will continue, yet it always leaves open the possibility of such progress. Fortified by determination, that confidence can sustain hope (1986, 415).

Whether or not a more vigorous democratic ethos will permeate the political culture of post-industrial, post-modern America is, as Kloppenberg states, an open question, yet, its potentiality in itself is significant in shaping behavior, attitudes and action. Such an expectation, moreover, represents the broad canvass that has given the Reading Center vision its power. The Center's energies are predominantly local, emerging out of the potencies resident within its immediate milieu. Yet, its ethos is shaped in no small part by a broader vision of tempered optimism, grounded in an intellectual universe of pragmatic experimentalism in a social setting that is both constrained and opened. Although far from realizing anything like Dewey's ideal of perpetual growth, certain expansive pathways have been opened up at the Reading Center that provide a foundation for *further* development.

Faced with a future that is simultaneously precarious and replete with opportunity, the Reading Center has not yet achieved what it may yet become. Like the lives of its students, volunteers and manager, the program itself, is "in process." Its history has provided a certain direction and inevitably certain connections will be able to be drawn between the Center's past and its emerging future. In any event, we move inexorably into that open future which will prove the ultimate determinant of what the Center will become and even, in fundamental ways, what we have been since our understanding of the past only takes shape through a continuously moving present:

> For we live not in a settled and finished world, but in one which is going on, and where our main task is prospective, and where retrospect-and all

> knowledge as distinct from thought is retrospective-is of value in the solidity, security, and fertility it affords our dealing with the future (Dewey, 1916, 151).

At stake is not only an issue of epistemology; how and what we know, but that of ontology or being; what we actually become.

Except as it emerges as a topic of study within its instructional program or informs its immediate political culture, it is beyond the purview of the Reading Center to have much influence at all on the fate of democracy in America. Yet, the manner in which democracy works itself out in the broader body politic, cannot but play a critical, albeit indelible role on the Center's continuously emerging organizational and learning climate. Dewey's vision of progressive enlightenment through education, for its more full manifestation requires a political culture that nurtures both individuals and communities to realize their best "selves." Such a vision did not come to pass in the early twentieth century and it is certainly not upon us now at the end of the century. Yet, as long as optimism itself and a pragmatic temperament, however disfigured in the post-modern, post-industrial era, remain salient to the American identity, the open quest for becoming will endure. This quest has served as a defining ideal of the Bob Steele Reading Center.

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MY LIFE AS A STUDENT AT THE BOB STEELE READING CENTER:

DERRICK IS HIP ON YOU KNOWING

Interview by George Demetrion
Manager, Bob Steele Reading Center
Literacy Volunteers of Greater Hartford
April, 1993

AN INTERVIEW WITH DERRICK MATTHEWS

I can say that I enjoyed just about every second of the times I've spent here learning. I come here from four to eight p.m., Monday through Thursday. I can sit at a table by myself, maybe for fifteen minutes to a half-hour, not doing any reading or writing, just sitting there, just looking. I may see some new ideas, a new method of learning, which way I could help a student. Things could come into my mind, just sitting. I just look around me and say, why can't we have this whole floor for the Literacy Volunteers?

Discovering a Reading Problem

Well, it started with the Hopewell Baptist Church, four years ago, in '88, I think it was. On Wednesday night we have a prayer service and Bible study and the pastor goes around the room asking people to read the Scripture. So he came to me and I started reading the Scripture, stumbled over the words and then he went back around and he skipped me. And I said (to myself), "Gee, was I reading that bad?" And after that I knew I needed help. That's when I discovered I had a reading problem.

At that precise moment of reading there were words I didn't know at all. I mean, it was just like a blind man trying to feel his way through something. I felt bad because there was a word I didn't have any knowledge of whatsoever, even trying to pronounce it because they were difficult: old words or someone's name that were hard to pronounce. Even an educated person will find it difficult to pronounce those words. I didn't think the first time around I was reading that bad because other people in the group were kind of stepping over words a little bit. But when he skipped me, I must have been reading pretty bad. I wasn't ashamed or bashful, or hurt or anything like that. I just discovered I needed help.

So I met a friend named Joanne and I told her I got this new Bible and I need someone to help me read it. She told me about Literacy Volunteers. So I called and went down to the Reading Center and started to talk to George. I took a test and after the test he told me I needed help on my reading and writing.

I was comfortable on my everyday life, working and talking to people. I could write notes to a girl friend or my wife when I was married. I was comfortable with that. The only thing that might come up now and then, is if I really had to write things I'm not familiar with. But other than that, if I'm focused about what I have to write, I can write it with no problem. Or I can look through a magazine or papers, this type of literature, to find a word I need to know, or a dictionary, or something like that, but other than that, I had no problem.

My First Perception of the Reading Center

When I first came in, I thought it was going to be a school setting. But as I walked in and I saw the three big tables and a couple card tables and a few students sitting with their tutors and saw a group of people, like six people with one or two tutors at the table, I said, "well, this is not a school setting." But just watching everybody being busy learning, that interested me. I just looked around the room and saw what everybody was doing. Everybody was concentrating on their subject matter they were working on. A few people were talking louder than others, but it wasn't any distraction.

Everybody's mind, believe it or not, this is the fantastic part of the whole thing: everybody's mind was on one accord, learning. Even if you got a person talking louder than someone else and someone was trying to study, it didn't bother them or phase them. They had their mind on studying or learning. That's a fantastic thing! Now if you take that same situation into a school, you'll get a lot of complaints, saying they can't study cause there's too much confusion going on. This is a difference, I would say, from a young student and an older student, an adult. This is something they want to do regardless of what's going on around them: to study, to learn, that's the difference.

So I had a tutor, for about six weeks. I wasn't scared. My main thought was just improving on my reading and writing and which I was continuing doing. Then later I got another tutor, Dot. She helped me a great deal. And different things I learned by trying to remember things. If I saw things in a flash, I could more or less photograph it in my mind and then kind of bring it back to me. Once a subject is being discussed, something that's being talked about or something I heard, things can bring back my memory from what I have seen.

I can read the subject matter, but some of the words I may not be familiar with. I see that word and write that word down and then go to some different writing. I can use that word, getting roughly how that word is spelled. But I can close my eyes and focus on the book that I was reading and how that word was placed in that structure and bring some remembrance to me. So I can recall what that word looks like and how it was spelled and this is the main part of reading. About 90% of anything that you do is remembering. So I kept focus on that, trying to remember things as much as I can.

Some Things I Have Learned

Getting involved with people, the younger students, the older students. I met students 20 years old. I met students from 40, 50 and even 60 years old. And talking with them, and finding out why they haven't learned the skill of reading and writing. There's an amazing thing that I found out: the American Blacks in their 50s and 60s and even in their late 40s, have been in the South and had to work. They didn't have a way to go to school because they had to work. And they didn't develop their reading and writing skills and that was kind of shocking to me in the 90s to hear something like that. So that was an interest. Then I met people, male and female, from Jamaica. They had to work. Everybody in the household had to work. So they didn't have the time to go to school like they wanted to or they had to take care of their brothers and sisters.

There's things that I learned in hearing through students, their reading and writing problems that they didn't develop over the years and now coming ahead to develop that skill, because they want something out of life. They know they need something better in life. I see now that even for myself, reading and writing, that's all I wanted, but come to find out, it was more than that what I wanted because it opened up a lot of doors. When you keep on feeding the brain with new ideas, knowledge about reading and writing and other learning skills, other doors are opened up. I learned to talk and speak better to other people about the Literacy Volunteers and I have my own interests to talk about, maybe somebody home that I wanted to talk to and now have the heart, the mind and the conversational skill to talk to them. Now I'm more open. And I feel there's a lot of students like that. Whatever they have hidden, learning can bring it out.

Technology and Literacy

The Typewriter

If I feel that my studies are kind of slow and I'm being impatient about it, I try to find another method to speed up the process like working with a typewriter. When you're working with the typewriter you have to concentrate on the keyboard for one and type the letter. Let's use the word, "the," and you have to concentrate, "t." You had to find the key and say "t" and hit that key and put it on paper, says "t," then you had to think of "h" and "e." Now free writing, it's almost an automatic thought. Just write it down real fast. If you have to write a whole sentence, this gives you something to think about. You had to concentrate on each letter by typing. In writing, you had to concentrate on writing the whole word, not just the letters of the word, *per se*. That's what you're taking for granted when you free write. You're just writing the word, not the letters *per se*.

Tape Recorder

Record what you read. Play it back and hear how you sound. I try to read now the way I speak. When I'm reading, I try to act like a character whatever I'm reading. When I feel like I'm reading kind of slow and just reading the word, word by word, or syllable by syllable, then I speed up the process by going into a character and change my voice and start reading. Then I try to read faster.

I taped myself reading and I felt like, "the - cat - was - jumping - over - the - fence." (in monotone) That's reading, but when I say, "the cat was jumping over the fence" (in expressive dialect), it gave it a little more depth, a little more meaning. I didn't feel I was dragging it. I wanted to put more emphasis into it, a little more life. I didn't want to be boring with it. I discovered that's when I started putting a character or voice sound into my reading, becoming a character reader so to speak.

Computer Literacy

I learned a lot from the computer. I wish every advanced student would have some kind of experience working with the computer because that really helped me as far as reading a little faster. We had short stories on the computer. It would have, maybe, about two lines of sentences and you had to read that, then change over to the next line and me working with that same story, let's say, for about two or three days. Each time that I kept on going over it, I read a little faster. Out of ten questions, I might answer seven correctly at first and miss three. So I go back and do it again and this way I can develop my remembering pattern and when I did it the second time, I got nine of them right instead of seven before. So the third time, I got them all right. So then I go to another subject matter and worked on that. At the end of the week, I go back to the story that I did two or three days prior to that and see what I remembered. Once I got all of them right, I could move on to the next story. So this would develop my memory pattern as far as remembering.

You have the words on the screen. That's bright colors, it's colorful. It's like storybook colors. That's interesting and to see different subjects in the story itself. They have it moving. So it's like a television coming out of the storybook and that's what makes it interesting. In this, you can just read line for line or if you develop a little more, you can read two or three lines, let's say, in thirty seconds. In a book, you just work at your own pace, but in a computer you can work at a pace you're trying to program yourself to do and once you pass that, you can go a little faster. It will increase your speed reading, comprehension and the way that you read. It has a variety of ways which you can learn, than just taking a book and just reading it. I wish we had more material on that.

The Importance of Writing

The reason writing is so important for me is a lot of things I did in my life that I wanted to express through writing, more so than verbally. So I can put it into writing to let people know what kind of life I had. Not to say it was bad or anything like that. Just to share it with readers and mostly the students themselves. Lot of people did a lot of things in their life. Like a lot of things that happened, good, bad, right or wrong and it should be expressed. If you're hurting, you have to let out some type of noise to let people know you are hurting. If you keep that inside, you'll hurt even more. So, to have some type of outlet, writing's one of the processes. Of what I have inside over the years, I can express it verbally, but I couldn't express it in writing.

When you tell someone a story, you might have about twenty people there. Or you might tell one person about your experience. But when you're writing, you can open up to a world. You can let everyone know through writing what you went through. This is what I choose to do. So I take my writing very seriously because it's a message I want people to know what I done in my life. And if they shared the same thing, fine. We have a common bond.

Meeting Other Students Through Writing

We have something in common. We have a common bond. Let's say we have a reading problem and writing problem. But now we have developed we can write to one another and communicate and to share a common interest as far as our own personal lives. This reminds me of a person, like if you come to my house and we eat supper together, we have a common bond. This is the same way with writing, when another brother or sister has that same situation you have. A far as reading and writing, you share that common interest. It's important to have that kind of bond. We share a common interest which is learning, reading and writing. We are focusing on one thing. Everybody's mind is on one accord. And when you get everybody's mind on one accord, then you have to have something special, there.

How *Welcome to our World* Helped me to Communicate with My Mother

I wanted to show my mother *Welcome To Our World*, but I just found out, the way she talked to us over the years, that anything we do, sound like the way we heard it, she is like putting us down, so to speak, or sound negative instead of positive. To give you a perfect example of what I'm speaking about, a couple years ago, a deacon of my church came to me and say, "Derrick, do you have an interest in becoming a deacon?" I say, "Yes, I do. I want to become a deacon." So he say, "ok, I'll submit your name in." "Ok, I appreciate that." I told my mother. I say, "the deacon came up to me and told me that he's gonna submit my name in to be a deacon." My mother said, "you sure this is what you want to do? There's a lot of work in being a deacon." Now I took that like a slap in the face.

Now for me, if my son will come up to me and tell me the same thing, I will say, "good, I'm proud they asked you to be a deacon." I would praise him first and then I would say it's a lot of work behind that. So think it out and make sure it's what you want to do. But like I said, my mother gives me the negative.

Then we've been going through this over the years, me and my brothers. Two weeks ago we just had a discussion with my mother. And she said, "I am very sorry that I didn't know that's what I was doing." And I said, "well, I'm gonna show you something. I had *Welcome To Our World* for a long time, over a year. and I never showed her any of my material, only my song *Jesus*. Now she praised me good about the song that I have written. But anything else, I kind of kept it to myself or shared with my brothers. Bringing it to my mother, I felt she was going to say something negative and I didn't want to hear that. So I didn't share anything with her. She knew I was learning about my reading and writing and she praised me on that. But as far as the major things that I was doing for the Literacy Volunteers I didn't tell her what I was doing. So now we got an understanding after thirty-five years.

I showed her *Welcome To Our World*. She told me, "you did good. I'm very proud of you for what you've written and what you have said and a few things you said, wasn't correct. And I didn't know whether to mark you down to make a correction." I said, "please make a correction! I'm willing for you to do that, 'cause I don't want to say anything that is misleading or something false." We agreed on that. That had an impact. So it did help.

You can read just about any subject matter that you are facing, in that book. When I went through it and read a lot of material I found it was just like a Bible.

Any subject that I wanted to get into as far as personal feelings, loving one another in a personal way, it has that. Someone has written something about that. Self-esteem you want to build that up, it has that in that book. It has all of that. The process of learning and writing and reading, talking to a family member, talking to a relative, talking to a personal friend about your problem. It has that. Cooking, it has that.

Other Learning Needs

I wish maybe later we can get into another book that really gets a little more involved with people's needs and wants. *Welcome To Our World* has some description about getting a job, but does not go to the full depth of it. Maybe that, and, ok, the majority of students want to get driver's licenses. I'd like to see a video we could get instead of going through a driver's manual book. That's a tedious job on a tutor as well as the student. I'm quite sure they have a video about learning how to drive. And I think we should get into that. And child care. I'm quite sure they have a video about that. If your baby has a cough, how to treat them. I'm talking about something basic, something simple that should be easy to learn. Maybe the rights of baby sitting. This is going to be a big issue. These types of things I had talked about to a few students already. The majority, want driving licenses. Another issue that was discussed was health care on their children, and getting their GED. These three issues, I think, are the main issues as far as the students.

Peer Tutoring

I think the one thing I really got a big kick out of was teaching someone else how to read. Second, teaching someone how to write. One of the students who came up to me, his tutor didn't show up, or something, so he asked me to work with him. And I asked him, "Gary, have you ever written a letter?" He said, "no." I say, "do you think you can write one?" "No, I can't, " he say. "I could read pretty good, but I can't write one." I say, "I can have you write a letter within five minutes." He said, "no way." So I say, "you know how to spell **I**?'" He say, "yes." I say, "write the word, **I**." I say, "you know how to spell **love**?" He say, "yes." "And do you know how to spell **you**?" He say, "yes." "Well, write that." So when he written that, I say, "that's your first letter, **I love you**." He say, "that's not complete." I say, "yes it is complete. Have you ever tell a person that you love them? That's a complete thought." I say, "that's a powerful word in the English language; 'love.' So that was your first letter." He looked at it and say, "you're right." That felt good!

I like to come up with ideas that I feel can help a student on his learning as well as writing. When someone comes into the room, I stop what I'm doing and look at that person. Whatever thought may come into my mind, that gives me the impulse to say or do something with them on their reading and writing. And that's how I come up with something. It's not a plan. It's something that just comes up. I will say it's a spiritual guidance, but I don't like to talk about that too much cause somebody might think I'm going off the wall. But it's something that just clicks to me. And I react to it. And it works. Maybe it's a special gift that I have that's starting to develop.

I was stuck with a class. A tutor didn't show up and I had six students. I told them they were going to write something about love. "Oh, no, we don't want to get into that!" I said, "yes, let's get into that." Some people have very different ways to express themselves. They think men are proud not to express themselves. I like to express myself! So I felt that was a good subject matter to do. I say, "you can write someone you are personally involved with or someone in the past, present or future. Something like that, or a thing, a place, whatever, that you can express yourself, using the word, "love." And I got a lot of writing behind that. See, when you give someone something new and they're not focusing on what to do and how to do it, it comes difficult for a second. But once they think about it and start thinking about the subject matter, it comes easy. But as far as writing about it, it was very difficult.

So about three students out of six, they had a problem. "I can't write nothing. I don't know what to write. I can't spell it." I say, "who you want to write a letter about that you love?" I say, "don't you have any children?" "Yes." "Write about your children. You love your children, don't you?" "Yes." "Well, write something about them that you're glad to be a mother of your children. That's something to write about, something to be proud of." Another person was going with this girl and he didn't know what to write about. I say, "well, write about how you felt when you broke up with that person, how you miss that person: write about that."

There was another person who loved his mother, but he was never the kind of person to say he really loved her. I say, "have your mother been good to you? She hasn't abused you or anything like that? And any time you felt troubled or being in trouble, was she there for you?" "Yes." "So, write about that. Let her know how you feel. Say, 'at this time I'm thinking about you, Mommy,' you know, "and I love you." You can just say that. That's only going to take two lines."

And when I got them to write, and they felt a little better about themselves and the subject matter we chose. I felt good, very good.

Why Education is Important to Me

When I was growing up, there was a discussion. Man, if we could write a book on all the things we did, we'd be millionaires. We said that, but we never had the thought to do that. Now it's starting to come to a reality. I see my dreams, my ideas are starting to form shape. And this is what I encourage everyone to do. You have a dream, an idea, or something that you really want to do: go for it! If you want to be a boxer at forty years old, go for it! If you want to be a ballet dancer at sixty years old, go for it. Anything that you want to do. This is the wonderful thing about being an American. Anything that you have a thought and mind to do, do it! You have the opportunity to do it, so do it! If you want to improve your education as far as reading and writing and move on, you have that chance, that opportunity to do it. I don't care if you're sixty years old, just learning how to read and write. They had a person, oldest person that I heard, graduated from college, was sixty-eight years old. That's something to be desired! So this is letting you know, anything that you have in mind to do and have the will and a belief, do it. That's what it's all about. And this is what I'm trying to do.

There was a question asked of me a couple of weeks ago: "Derrick, three to five years down the road, what would you look at yourself to be into?" I felt that I may be involved in some type of education. To what point to what degree, I don't know, but something to do with education. What I'm doing now may relate to that. I may be a spokesperson for Literacy Volunteers, like what I'm doing now. But it may be something more professional. I'm trying to set a stage for someone else to come in and to take over and to do what I do if not better. I'm setting the stage for that. Anything that you have a mind to do, go ahead and do.

I can see now what education can really do, what it does for other people. I had my own personal experience with it. It sets new adventures for me, new ideas, new challenges. So I think this is what I'm going for. Anything that comes my way I take it as a challenge and see what I can do with it. If I do something fine with it, fine. If I don't succeed in it, I can move on to something else.

Education makes me talk a little better, it makes me get involved with people much more. I'm an involved person. I guess you might say I'm a brain picker. I like to pick people's brains. I like to talk to them about before they came to the Reading Center, what they were doing, what they're doing now and what they want to do tomorrow and see where they're headed. And that gives me an idea to write something about that, about another student, where they're headed with their ideas and how they going forth with that.

It feels good, because when you learn something of value, you can't take it away. I'm more serious now than when I was twenty-eight years old. It makes me more serious now because I have a different attitude towards education and I feel it's necessary to have it. And later on, through the years, someone can say, that person had a reading problem. Now look what he's doing. I want to set the stage for anyone who sees me, meets me, talks to me, reads my material, whoever's been in contact with me in any kind of way to see what I have done. Lot's of students come in here, "I want to learn how to read and write." They come to find out, "geez, I can talk a little better." Think of Douglas. When he first came he was kind of closed-mouth. But now, he talks better than I do. Sylvia, she was kind of closed-mouth. She talks more and she's writing more. David, he was a talkative person, but now he's more expressive in the way he talks. So learning and being educated gave them another avenue of expressing themselves. And that's what learning has done for a lot of people, not only me, but other people.

Confidence and Ability

It feels like; ok, when I look at something, I can look at this map of Hartford. I can get a lot of ideas from it. I can maybe see a picture in that. I can express an idea about writing about what I see. I can express myself in many ways. I can say something verbally. I can write it and I can draw something to express myself. A lot of ideas come to my mind. When before I had things come into my mind, but, "I better not do that. That ain't gonna work out." I wasn't too confident. I wasn't sure. But now, I don't care if I'm sure or not. I just go ahead and do it. Before, I would hesitate, shall I do it, or that's not right to do it or leave it alone. I'm more assured that anything I want to do I just go ahead and do it, good, bad, right or wrong. Just be bold enough to do it. The learning process had got me to think that way.

You have a variety of things to offer. But it takes education to bring all this out. I guess what education has done for me is to bring all these things out of me. I may of had it from the beginning, but it never was an opportunity time for it all to be brought out until education came into my life and opened these things up to me, to give me more ways to express myself.

Ability, to work at something to the best of what you can do -- like my writing, I got involved in my writing so much, it took more priority than my reading. My reading had went down to a slump. My writing, I got good at it. I liked it. I got my kicks out of writing. You talk to other students, you don't hear too much of that. But I got a lot out of writing, to express myself. And I did it so much and so well at the time that I became good and that's what it's about. To be sure of something, that's just taking a challenge. Ok, it's just like if you throw a project at me. "Derrick, tomorrow can you go to the Horace Bushnell Church and talk to 500 people about the Literacy Volunteers?" "No problem." "Ok, can you write me about ten pages about the Literacy Volunteers?" I'll work at it. That's a challenge to see if I can do that. That's the difference.

I think this is a big test for me. What are my limits? Right now, I'm seeking to see what that is. If I get into something that doesn't work right, I'm moving on to the next thing. I think that's where I stand, right now. I don't know my limits, right now. I'm just taking anything I can grab onto and seeing what I can do with it.

The Relationship Between Literacy and My Spiritual Life

I feel that I'm doing a missionary work spiritually. God said, "carry out my work. Carry out my duties." That means to me, touching other human beings with what I have learned, pass it on to someone else. And then they can pass it on, a chain reaction. To help another human being. I put myself on the line when I went to my job and told them I had a reading problem. I was with the Literacy Volunteers and exposed myself to help other people in my job: to let them know they can get help as far as their reading and writing. Now my supervisor could have came up to me, "well Derrick, since you have a reading problem and you got to be working with computers, we can take you off your job and put you just on a maintenance job." But, thank God, that didn't happen. But, thank God, I did get to draw other people to the Literacy Volunteers. That makes me feel that I did not man's work, but God's work. I feel like a missionary.

Everybody has a purpose in life and, like you may have a drug problem. And you could go out there and talk to churches, different prisons, talk about your drug problem and what it did for you and how you don't want other people to get involved. I have a reading problem. I'm glad that I have a reading problem! Some people would say, "gees, I wish I didn't have a reading problem." But I'm glad! because I know this is my destiny. This is my mission. This is more my mission than anything that I have done with my life. That's why literacy is important for me personally, because I have a mission. This is a job for me to do spiritually and morally and I'm trying to carry this out the best way I possibly can. Talking to people, they see something in me. Darryl, one of the students, he say, "I thought you was a tutor." I say, "how did you think that?" "The way you was reading your book to yourself and the way you carry yourself, you look like a tutor more so than a student." I say, "you could be the same way. Take your tutor seriously, you'll learn on a positive level."

You don't know how long you're going to be on this God's earth. Make good use of it while you're here. If God's putting you through a reading and writing process, get as much as you can out of it. And don't be selfish with it. Because you be selfish with it, He'll take that away from you. That's my belief!

I'm the kind of person that any time I talk, they say I draw attention. Someone said that looking at me, they can spill their own guts. I guess I have that peace part of care, that you look at me, you can trust me. Then the way I talk to a person, they can confide in me. A person don't want to talk, I can have them talk. I have that gift. I have this way about me that I can have people talk. And this is good, 'cause some things a student should share their feelings about something they done in their lives. I think it's bad for a person to walk on this God's earth not to share some type of life experience, one way or another, with another human being. This is one way of doing it. I think it should be done, 'cause I feel that even myself, before I came here, I shared a lot of things, good, bad, right or wrong, too. But this is more rewarding and more promising. This is the greatest gift a person can give, themselves. And I'm definitely trying to give myself to another human being.

Reading Center as Community

It's good the students and tutors come in here, and talk with each other and discuss their needs and wants, on the tutor's issues as well as the student's issues and to come on one accord, to help one another. I think that's the biggest thing. I don't think there's a student in here, haven't met up some of their needs. At least their needs are being answered and worked on, if not immediately, they are being pacified enough so they're not being bored and say, "we'll leave this place and find another place to go into." That's another thing I want to get into personally, with myself. Students who have dropped out; to track them down and find out why they dropped out or if there's any reason, if any, on what happened. Even with the tutors, why they dropped out.

I have tracked down two students a couple of weeks ago and two of them, I talked to. One of them told me about transportation problems and the weather's getting cold, so they didn't have any transportation. And I said, well, I can work with you I can pick you up at a given time. I tried that about once or twice. Then I ended seeing that person. So they went into their own thing.

The Reading Center and the School System

I would like to see Literacy Volunteers and the Reading Center open up a little more in a commercial sense. I think we should have more personal advertisement about the Literacy Volunteers and have students who have run through the process to speak out and go in the community, like I did to different churches, to different public groups and libraries and talk with the students. Because right now, public education, they are questioning, is this working or not. And maybe, we might get a difference, since this is the '90s, going into a new century pretty soon. This may be a new way of life, of learning, the Literacy Volunteers way. We have so many problems with the public school system. A lot of kids are dropping out. They're losing interest at an early age. So this may be the frontier of education and if so, we better prepare ourselves for that.

Have the Board of Education and the principals of the different schools in the neighborhood come to see what we do and how we do it. And this may give them an idea. Say, "ok, we got forty or forty-five students in a class. Maybe we should break some of those classes up into smaller groups." That's what I see. You're touching a little bit of that now with the Milner School and see what's being done there. *(This is one of LVGH's family literacy neighborhood sites, based in Hartford's predominantly black North End, ed).* You get a parent who has a reading problem and couldn't read to their children and the children kind of lose interest in the school itself because they don't have that self-esteem. So now the child thinks of itself as being dumb. Then you got junior high students and high school students dropping out and why -- there's no interest there to hold their attention. So you got to come up with a new idea, totally, brand new. And one of the ways that we can do this is break the classes into a smaller and smaller groups and see if we can reach them in that way.

Vision for the Future

To have twenty rooms on this floor, each room has a different subject matter. You remember the TV series, *Fame*? They had different classes, dancing music, acting, poetry, all sorts -- a Prince Tech type of thing. This could be the same way with Literacy Volunteers. This is what I was saying some months ago; to expand. Because people have more that they need than reading and writing. Maybe we could have another class on just learning how to get your drivers license. Another class, working on automobiles, on being a mechanic. You check with the tutors we've had over the years. We're talking about a good twenty years. Check their background. You'll be amazed what you'll find. You have some nurses, some doctors. You have some lawyers. You have a lot of professional people. We could have used their special talents to improve the students' education -- what they wanted to get into. I think this is going to be another way that literacy is going to have to open up.

We are being outnumbered, so to speak. Different classes in the city, they have computers. And the methods we have may not be an interest in attracting a lot of attention. That computer might be enough to attract their attention. You need to be mindful of that. When I go to the board meeting to hear that these kinds of agencies helping students in the city of Hartford, and you may have twenty of them in the city of Hartford, alone, and they try to get a grant. You find all these agencies popping up out of the woodwork, working to teach someone and the Literacy Volunteers has a foundation already. But you have to expand to the computer side of it or another issue to help the students' needs and their wants. Don't let it be like Pratt and Whitney, just working on engines and engines, alone. Have something else to fall back on. In other words, don't put all your eggs in one basket. To expand, this is the word now, to expand.